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# Metaphysical and Occult Explorations of H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf

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## Résumé de synthèse

Les études classiques sont l'étude de la rhétorique et de la mythologie grecque et romaine. C'est l'étude des « sources intellectuelles et de l'imaginaire de Grèce et de Rome ». L'influence classique, par extension est considérée par certains érudits tels que Gilbert Highet (The Classical Tradition), comme des reflets de la mythologie et de la rhétorique dans les œuvres postclassiques. La présente étude vise à élargir une telle compréhension de l'influence classique afin d'inclure des systèmes de valeurs et des cadres de référence dont les origines, même si elles ne semblent pas refléter les figure classiques, peuvent néanmoins remonter aux processus de réflexion de l'epoque classique.

La tension quintessencielle et déterminante de la pensée occidentale émergente, soit celle des visions physique et métaphysique de la réalité, a donné naissance à une rhétorique particulière qui est notre héritage de la tradition classique judéo-grecque : des modèles d'articulation sous forme de langage figuré qui peuvent exprimer les expériences de transformation – et le faire clandestinement par surcroit, si nécessaire. H.D., D.H. Lawrence et Virginia Woolf ont hérité du sens des « choses qrecques » propres au 19$^{e}$ siècle ainsi que du besoin d'un lieu de rassemblement de l'esprit, et les ont utilisés pour exprimer les expériences transformatrices, souvent religieuses, au cours d'une époque de sécularisation, de conflits humains à travers le monde et de désespoir émotionnel et philosophique généralisé. Les rédacteurs de la présente étude ont offert des messages de foi et d'espoir ainsi que des perspectives toujours plus larges de la réalité. Croyant qu'ils faisaient face à des problèmes sans précédent, ils ont

regardé au-delà de la réalité connue et découvert des discours du passé assez flexibles pour articuler des futurs métamorphosants.

La rhétorique sur laquelle est centrée la présente étude provient principalement de la bible : langage mythique, pseudépigraphie, satire et langage codé. Pour les modernists, l'importance de cette rhétorique réside dans sa capacité à communiquer en couches de signification. Chaque auteur de la présente étude avait sa propre motivation pour utiliser une telle rhétorique tout en partageant la même force de stimulation, un cadre de référence nommé resistance, que permet la présente rhétorique héritée d'un lointain passé judéo-grec. Que ce soit le gothique littéraire de Woolf ou l'adjonction gnostique de H.D. ou la métaphore magique de Lawrence, tous les travaux pertinents à la présente étude les placent en désaccord et en opposition avec l'idéologie et la culture dominantes de leur temps.

La présente étude examine de près les facons dont les auteurs modernistes H.D., D.H. Lawrence et Virginia Woolf ont exprimé leur visions alternatives de l'univers et de la réalité par le biais de conventions littéraires héritées de l'influence classique. Les similitudes entre les œuvres comprennent la perspective ironique et la résistance à une prise de position ou à un discours culturel marginalisant mais dominant.

Dans un monde postclassique, l'influence classique continue d'évoluer en partie parce qu'elle offre un cadre de référence par le biais d'un logo bien établi, sinon d'un discours. Finalement, peut-être que l'aspect le plus important de l'héritage grec réside dans sa capacité d'offrir un discours subtil en faveur de la

résistance et du changement, une facon de dire l'inducible, dèncadrer ce qui ne peut l'être, d'être accepté et de fair accepter l'inacceptable aux générations futures.

## Abstract

Classical study is the study of Greek and Roman mythology and rhetoric. It is the study of "the intellectual and imaginative sources of Greece and Rome." The classical influence, by extension, is considered by scholars such as Gilbert Highet (*The Classical Tradition*) to be reflections of the mythology and rhetoric in post-classical works. This study seeks to broaden this understanding of the classical influence to include frames of reference and literary conventions or devices which, though they may not ostensibly hold a mirror to classical figures, can nonetheless be traced to classical times and thought processes.

The quintessential and defining tension of emerging Western thought, that of the physical and metaphysical views of reality, gave rise to a particular rhetoric which is our inheritance from the Judaeo-Greco classical tradition: patterns of articulation in the form of figurative language which can express experiences of transformation – and, moreover, do so secretly when necessary. H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf inherited the 19th century sense of 'things Greek,' as well as the need for a gathering place of the mind, and used these to express transformative, often religious, experiences during a time of secularization, world-wide human conflict, and widespread emotional and philosophical despair. The writers in this study offered messages of faith, hope, and ever-widening vistas of reality. Believing that they were facing problems which had no precedent, they envisioned beyond the known and discovered discourses from the past flexible enough to articulate transformative futures.

The rhetoric upon which this study focuses derives mainly from the Bible: mythical language, pseudepigraphy, satire, coded language. The importance to the modernists lies in the ability of this rhetoric to communicate in layers of meaning. Each author in this study had his or her own motivation for employing such rhetoric, yet they all share the driving force, a frame of reference termed *resistance*, which this rhetoric inherited from the distant Judaeo-Greco past enables. Whether it be the literary Gothicism of Woolf, or the Gnostic subtext of H.D., or the magical metaphor of Lawrence, all of the works with which this study is concerned position themselves at odds with, in resistance to, the dominant culture and ideology of their time.

This study looks at ways in which modernist authors H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf expressed alternate visions of the universe and of reality through literary conventions inherited from the classical influence. Similarities between the works include ironic perspective and resistance to a marginalizing but dominant cultural stance or discourse.

In a post-classical world, the classical influence continues to evolve in part because it provides a frame of reference through an established logos, if not discourse. Ultimately, perhaps the most important aspect of Greek inheritance lies in its ability to provide a subtle discourse for resistance and change, a way to speak the unspeakable, to frame the unframable, to find for the unacceptable acceptance and a passage to future generations.

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# Introduction

Methodology

This study addresses figures of speech employed by modernist writers H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf to express metaphysical and occult concerns. The world in which they lived – the world of the Great War, of Nietzsche's death of God, of secularization and the disintegration of community values – was not conducive to such experience and provided few modes of expression for them. H. D., Lawrence, and Woolf used metaphoric and ironic means of expression, reaching back to classical and Judaeo-Greco rhetoric, that would echo and reverberate, carrying sufficient layers of meaning for their needs.

Malcolm Bradbury has dated the modernist period as occurring between 1890 and 1930.[1] The dates are not arbitrary, coinciding as they do with societal changes that altered personal perspectives to such an extent that creative expression altered as well. The Great War is the major event influencing the location of these dates, and Bradbury has included a time frame preceding the war that is nonetheless historically part of the build-up to it.

In challenging the so-called 'real', the high realism of the Victorian period, literary modernists exhibited great fascination with irrational forces, unreason and primitivism. They reacted to the breakdown of certainty by seeking "some sense of the self in relation to the past and to the individual's

[1] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism: 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). See also Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1993); Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping*

inner being."[2] Evelyn Cobley calls it, "the modernist desire for Baudelaire's 'the eternal and the immutable' [which] was satisfied through a 'mythic' method whose nostalgia for a cultural tradition expresses a deeply conservative impulse."[3] The seeming contradiction is in the 'deeply conservative impulse' that underlies the ways the modernist works in this study break from tradition.

> The complexity of modernism stems from its containing both the spiritualistic, religious impulses of high romanticism and the scientific, rationalistic impulses of realism while at the same time bringing to center stage the issue of art's autonomy. Modernism can never decide if it wants to occupy the fully secular and political world of modernity that realism attempts to master or if it wants to escape into some separate aesthetic realm that is more free and more pure than the world of ordinary human making.... Like all romantic artists, the modernists harbor hopes of transforming the world of modernity, but with much less belief than nineteenth-century artist/intellectuals that such acts of transformation are within their power.[4]

The tie that binds the seemingly disparate authors in this study is that each attempts a literary act of transformation. They each do so through structures that are intrinsic to the work, which emanate from within the text in the most closeted manner possible, so that to view the skeleton of the

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*Literary Modernism* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1985); Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

[2] Quinones 11.

transformational design requires ironic relief, mirroring in literature the reality of the basic atomic structure of life. Ultimately, there appears before us a view which belies the conventional sense of modernism as unable to "take its orientation from models supplied by another epoch."[5]

Modernity, as opposed to the literary movement of modernism, is a cultural movement which is seen as stretching over two to three hundred years. It is generally "understood as the condition in which society must legitimate itself by its own self-generated principles, without appeal to external verities, deities, authorities, or traditions."[6] As John McGowan points out, "a general consensus about the occurrence of some drastic change has emerged, no matter how we continue to argue details and dates."[7] Marx expressed his sense of the human fallout of this change when he said, "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face... the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men."[8] H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf express their sense of uncertainty, of the lack of solid base, of the shifting of dimensions and boundaries, of the need to face the conditions of their lives. They each argue, in the texts in this study, that boundaries are to be rediscovered, that the profaning of the holy is but an illusion, and that, in the midst of the crisis of uncertainty and powerlessness,

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[3] Evelyn Cobley, *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993) 207.
[4] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 7.
[5] Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trs. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), cited in McGowan 3.
[6] McGowan 3.
[7] McGowan 4.
[8] Karl Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*," cited in Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 21.

there is an ultimate upon which we can rely. This study looks at the rhetorical structures from the classical and Judaeo-Greco models that provided these authors with modes of discourse capable of articulating their shared vision of stability and power in the face of seeming-instability and seeming-powerlessness.

Language alters more slowly than our perceptions. In order to express the nuances of belief and experience, the writers in this study reached for their words to a time that, for them, existed more in the virtual than in the real. It existed more as a series of principles, more as a dimension of thought, than as an historical reality. This study traces specific rhetorical devices such as metaphor, coded language, and magic from the classical inheritance, which enable us to evaluate the extent to which H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf remained within established traditions and the extent to which they moved beyond.

Even as Woolf is envisioning a new paradigm of knowledge 'without appeal to external verities', she insists on closure, on the 'reality' of her vision. Even as H.D. was experimenting with poetic form, she was expressing the essence of an ancient Gnostic tradition. Lawrence was on one hand pushing the envelope of the novel form, while at the same time seeking more control over the world through mysticism. Tony Pinkney, in his *D.H. Lawrence and Modernism*, speaks of the "classicist culture" as having "an uncanny ability to inhabit, virus-like, literary forms which seem initially to contradict.... Modernism, too, so startlingly, even bizarrely different from the

classicist lineage of an Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson or Matthew Arnold, is also a secret refuge for classicism in our own century."[9] The rhetorical base of each of these works is intrinsically classical.

This study also recognizes the importance of the specific cultural focus on 'things Greek' that occurred during the 19th century and resulted in widespread effect upon the culture of the Western world. The rhetoric and the cultural manifestation are separate but co-joined. Would the rhetoric have been available for the writers – and would it have succeeded in its purpose – had the cultural interest that perpetuated the Greek phenomena not occurred?

The way we view the modernist ouevre has changed over time. As Leon Surette points out, in the mid-1970s the conventional view held that "mythological and Eleusinian elements of such representative modernist works as *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* were considered to be factitious formal and thematic devices" and that "this aestheticization of the apparently mystical or noumenal content of literary modernism was achieved through the tactic of Joyce's so-called mythological method."[10] Since then, we have begun to realize that the "apparently mystical or noumenal content" is far more central to the literature of this period than we had previously conceded.

Quinones divides the modernist output into three phases, the first being a response to the "social and historical conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." During the second phase, the modernists gave expression to the "'given' of their time and experience." The third phase, with

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[9] Tony Pinkney, *D. H. Lawrence and Modernism* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1990), 163-164.

which this discussion is mainly concerned, is that of recovery and renewal. Each of the visionaries in this study has made a connection with "some sense of the self in relation to the past," and has gone on to affirm a sense of inner being. The art then functions as a touchstone for renewal – a prophet's gift for a troubled world. For Woolf, the mystical vision provides the point of departure for coming to terms with life. For H.D., the occult project was a passion, not a tactic, and her work stands as a modern-day expression of Gnostic 'secret knowledge.' Lawrence went one step further in the mystical journey in experiencing the nouminous, in returning to communicate his experience, and finally, in attempting to transform the universe with words.

The quintessential and defining tension of emerging Western thought, that of the physical and metaphysical views of reality, gave rise to a particular rhetoric which is our inheritance from the classical tradition[11]: patterns of articulation in the form of figurative language which can express experiences

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[10] Surette ix.

[11] Some of the literary inheritance will be referred to in this study as 'Judaeo-Greco' to recognize the important contribution of the Hebrew tradition. Unless otherwise stated, 'classical' will refer to the standard Greco-Roman tradition. The division is by no means clear, regretfully, as from the Greco-Roman tradition originates certain literary devices, such as satire, of which the Hebrew tradition has made good use. See Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford UP, 1959). Highet defines classical influence in literature as reflections of the mythology and rhetoric of the culture of Greece and Rome – that which is "adapted from the creations of Greece and Rome" (2). By this he most often means direct allusions to, or clear use of, Greek and Roman mythology and rhetoric – including, for instance, "classical allusions" and "classical comparisons" (20), as well as the use of specific literary forms (satire, for example).

See also Charles Rowan Beye, *The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* (New York: Anchor, 1966); R.R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries from the Carolingian Age to the End of the Renaissance* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1954); K.J. Dover, *The Greeks and their Legacy*, Vol. II (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); M.I. Finley, ed., *The Legacy of Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981); Philip Mayerson, *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art, and Music* (Glenview, Il.: Scott, Foresman, 1971); John E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981); U. von Wilamowitz-

of transformation. The modernists inherited the 19th century sense of 'things Greek,' as well as the need for a gathering place of the mind, of which we will speak, and used these to express transformative, often religious, experiences during a time of secularization, world-wide human conflict, and widespread emotional and philosophical despair. The writers in this study offered a message of faith, of hope, and of ever-widening vistas of reality. Believing that they were facing problems which had no precedent, they envisioned beyond the known and discovered discourses from the past flexible enough to articulate transformative futures.

The Rhetorical Devices

(1) Mythical language.

G.B. Caird argues that myth is used in the Old and New Testaments "as metaphor systems for the theological interpretation of historical events."[12] For Caird, myth is a special kind of metaphor. This study supports this view of the metaphoric use of myth, without limiting myth to this or otherwise obliterating the distinction between myth and metaphor. This is only to say that the modernists in question certainly employed inherited mythic stories metaphorically. From Malinowski we accept the idea that myth "is not merely a story told but a reality lived," [13] eschewing his sense of the evolutionary and ritualistic in so-called primitive mythology in favor of a metaphorical

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Moellendorff, *History of Classical Scholarship*, trs. Alan Harris (1921; London: Duckworth, 1982).

[12] G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) 219.

[13] B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (N.Y.: Norton, 1927) 92.

interpretation: the myth "must be capable of bearing a contemporary face."[14] The modernists in question expressed 'a reality lived' through the conceit of myth.

So much has been written on myth that, as Caird writes, "we shall be wise to conclude that myth has a complexity which defies all attempts of the foolhardy to reduce it to a single origin or function."[15] As we explore the use of myth in the chapters to come we will only brush the surface of its complexity. Central to the discussion will be the specific use by H.D. of classical Greco-Roman myth. Yet, the discussion is certainly not limited to this as Lawrence employs an alternate mythic system in *The Plumed Serpent*. The convention for the use of such myth in literature can be traced back to the classical heritage. Caird points out that "the refashioning of a mythical motif [brings it] into line with the realities of historical experience,"[16] and at the same time history reinterprets the myth. We will observe this in the literature of the modernists. More than this, we will explore how mythical motifs enable not merely a 'reinterpreting' but a creation of a new myth, vital with its own inimitable currents and plays of meaning.

(2) Pseudepigraphy.

This is a literary device whereby what is written is attributed to someone other than the actual author. Of course, this is the essential nature of

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[14] Caird 228.
[15] Caird 223. See, for instance, E.M. Tillyard, *Myth and the English Mind* (N.Y: Collier, 1962), Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (N.J.: Princeton UP, 1957); Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), Joseph Campbell, *Transformation of Myth Through Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), and many, many more.
[16] Caird 232.

fiction. As a device, though, it stands in unique relation to the 'reality,' the non-fiction, sometimes indirectly being expressed. Removing the lived experience from contemporary time and authorship effectively shields it from exposure: should its metaphor be accurately decoded by other than those for whom it was intended, its impact would be lessened by the sense of deflection from the contemporary. Woolf employs pseudepigraphy most noticeably in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the delicate relationship between Septimus and Clarissa.

(3) Satire.

This genre is traced back to classical literature.[17] Irony is a form of speech which "assumes a double audience, the first understanding nothing beyond the face value of the words, the second seeing both the deeper meaning and the incomprehension of the first."[18] It has been called "Hebrew humour" as it afforded a means for the persecuted Jew to "indulge, though secretly, in a sly dig at fate, a sardonic smile at inquisitorial busybodies, a word satiric."[19] Recognition is far from simple. It can appear highly ambiguous, and the possible explanation of double meaning can seem improbable if you are not one of the initiated. It is the double mirror which reveals without revealing. Irony is the dominant rhetoric in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, and I will show that it informs Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*, as well.

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[17] See especially Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (N.J.: Princeton UP, 1962). Caird locates several examples of satire and its sub-genres in the Old and New Testament. See also Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, in which he discusses Plato's ironic use of language as a "momentous step in transforming the use of language" from metaphoric to dialectic (7-8).

[18] Caird 104.

[19] A.M. Klein, "Of Hebrew Humour," *Literary Essays and Reviews*, ed. Usher Caplan and M.W. Steinberg (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987) 104.

(4) Coded language.

Coded language is ironic, enabling two layers of meaning. It includes but is not limited to alchemy, Kabbalah, symbolism, and metaphor. In literature, coded language is effective in saying what you mean, to the initiated, even when such communication is difficult or dangerous in open, social and dialectical context. The irony discussed in this study, concerning *Helen in Egypt* and *The Plumed Serpent*, is traced to later, non-classical sources (Gnosticism and Kabbalah). It is my contention that the form was available for these later religious uses as part of the classical legacy.

(4) Prophecy, vision, and dreams.

Prophecy, vision, and dreams can be employed as literary conventions which are touchstones to the secret, the hidden.[20] They allow for a displacement of time and personal involvement. They provide a means of foreshadowing. They provide a means within narrative of revealing what has hitherto been hidden, be it connections, motivations, events. They provide an ideal and acceptable context for metaphoric language.

Caird has noted that in the Hebrew tradition, prophecy deals more often than not in absolutes: "The prophets do not make carefully qualified predictions that the Israelites will be destroyed unless they repent. They make unqualified warnings of doom, accompanied by unqualified calls to repentance."[21] Religious belief and literary convention go hand in hand here,

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[20] See *Oxford Dictionary*. Occult: a. 1533. [ad. L. *occultus*, pa. pple. of *occulere* to cover over.] Hidden (*lit.* and *fig.*).

[21] Caird 112.

as the human response (repentance) has the ability to act upon the predicted events and alter them.[22]

The Bible reflects a long tradition of literary use of prophecy, vision, and dreams. Caird points to the prophecy of Caiaphas (John 11:50) as ironical rather than oracular. He also discusses the Book of Daniel, in which "we find the fictitious Daniel describing in prophetic terms the history of the period between his time and the actual author's with greater wealth of detail as he approached the real date of writing.... what was 'future' to Daniel was past or present to the author and his readers."[23] Prophecy occurs most prominently in the hymns of *The Plumed Serpent.*

(6) Magic.

In literary convention, magic enables transformation, change. One of the most important languages of transformation for our purposes is that of the Kabbalah. This form of mysticism developed out of, and parallel to, Gnostic traditions around the 2nd century A.D. The written word effects social change through the belief that *body* (what we do in this world, including what we *write* in this world) is transformed into *mentality* or *spirit.*[24] When a writer has Kabbalah in mind, the tracks of the belief-system can usually be identified

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[22] See Caird. In the Hebrew tradition, prophecy, vision, and dreams are acceptable conduits for the will of God to be made manifest. "One of the distinctions between a true prophet and a false one is that the false prophet has not been sent (Jer. 23:21; 28:15); whereas the true prophet has been given 'authority over nations and over kingdoms, to pull down and to uproot, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant', by letting loose into the world that word of God which is 'like a hammer that splinters rock' (Jer. 1:10; 23:29)" (Caird 50). False prophecy, on the other hand, is punishable by death (Deut. 18:21-22). The same fate awaits the prophetic oracle which is seen as "a curse which has the magical power to bring about the event it predicts" (Caird 113). Magic causation is not tempered by human response, as is God's causal power (Caird 24).

[23] Caird 262-263.

in the work. Kabbalah has left unmistakable imprint upon the Jewish religion as it exists today, but remains a controversial mystical system because of its association with magic, which operates *without reference* to human response and therefore has difficulty claiming to be the will of God. *Magia* was condemned during classical times because it attempts to circumvent the will of God. It is my contention that the concept of magic, even though condemned by the Romans, nonetheless is part of the classical inheritance, and the ironic manner in which it is employed in *The Plumed Serpent* is most definitely classical.

The Language of Myth in Transcendent Expression

Foremost amongst the literary inheritance from the Greeks is the language of myth. So much has been said on this subject[25] that we must confine our comments to the one point which concerns the literature in question: *the language of myth is capable of mediating between mankind's acknowledged concepts of reality and that which is not articulated within the*

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[24] See Philip Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998) 46.

[25] See, for instance, Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973);* Campbell's *The Masks of God* series (New York: Viking, 1968); Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth,* trs. Susanne K. Langer (N.Y.: Dover 1946); Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* trs. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP 1961-64); Sir James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Abr. ed. (1922; New York: Macmillan, 1951); Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (1948; London: Faber and Faber, 1961); Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday, 1964); Richard Payne Knight, *The Symbolic Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1892); Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche* (New York: Harper, 1956); Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), just to name a few. The approaches vary, from Campbell, who views myth as an intermediary with the Godhead, to Neumann, who views myth as a key to the workings of the human psyche. Cassirer, Jung, and Knight focus on the language itself as having symbolic significance: that one thing (image, representation, action, and so forth) *represents* another or has a meaning beyond itself.

*boundaries of known experience.*[26] Such a definition can comprise, yet not be limited to, symbolic theory of myth, psychoanalytic theory of myth, semiotic theory of meaning, among other theories. Call it, perhaps, the *experiential* theory of myth. This is to say that one may have experiences that have never yet been articulated and are not within the boundaries of known human experience and cognition. As we will see in the literature of the modernists who were 'pushing the envelope' of known experience, the language of myth afforded them a means of articulation.

What kind of experience might one have difficulty articulating? Let's look for a moment at the inexpressibility of the experience of the sublime. In Western civilization, as was mentioned earlier, the perceived dichotomy between the physical and the metaphysical views of reality constitutes the defining tension of the culture – and the heritage is unquestionably Greek. Even as the components of democracy were germinating in the acknowledged birthplace of the Western world (and gaining ascendancy), another world-view was present. The one reality is the earthly one, pragmatic, logical, with defined boundaries; the other is transcendent. Perhaps it is simply amorphous. It is not 'unreal', but it is intangible. It has been seen variously as mythic and a reflection of the world of the gods, as the realm of God (Judaeo-Christian); it has been called perfection (Aristotelian), mystic, separated by a 'veil' (Romantic), spiritual versus physical, the mind/body duality (Descartes).

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[26] The Kantian sense posits the transcendent as that which is beyond the bounds of human cognition and thought. Schelling defined 'transcendental philosophy' as philosophy of the mind as distinct from that of nature (*Oxford* 2229).

These are all culturally bound references for experiences that remain inexpressible, though not unreal.

Although the tension between these two seemingly disparate visions of reality has been distinct in its influence on Western thought, it is by no means unique in the annals of human thought. Religious philosophers such as Joseph Campbell would point to the existence of an inherent religious impulse, of which such mystic/transcendent thoughts are evidence. C.G. Jung would agree that we share a 'collective unconscious' and 'archetypal knowledge' of which this 'religious impulse' is symptomatic. To the extent that such experiences are capable of being universal or experienced by many as a reality of human existence, we have developed rhetoric for their expression. Myth is one such rhetoric.

Insofar as myth is rhetoric, the logical corollary is that myth's suggestive capabilities are finite. However, this does not seem to be so. Myth eludes semantic boundaries. According to the *experiential* definition, the rhetoric of myth is infinitely flexible, has myriad layers, permutations and complexities, to *communicate* to the receiver. The substance of the communication is some concept that the receiver may never have encountered, or it may be some knowledge that needs must be shielded from the uninitiated. The language of myth, so far from being finite, is exceedingly flexible.

Mythopoesis

The roots of myth in the western world are undoubtedly classical (although myth is by no means confined to western tradition). Mythopoesis is the name we give myth in modern dress. *Mythogenesis* is the making of myth; *mythopoesis* and *mythology* are mythic poetry and mythic stories, respectively.[27] The word *mythopoeic* has extended its use, however, to include a way of thinking in which experience is not analyzed "into word and object, symbol and thing symbolized, but grasps all in a unitary act of perception."[28] This is the sense of it in this study. Caird points out that "the mythopoeic mind" is sometimes supposed to be "characteristic of primitive man"[29] who thereby 'made myth' which exists today, so the theory goes, as record of primitive thinking concerning phenomena of life. Caird disagrees, holding that unitary perception is characteristic "of the creative mind in all ages."[30] This study agrees with Caird. The works of the modernists in question do not explain one thing by means of another (superimposing mythic story, for instance, *to stand for* a lived experience). Neither do they simply compare one experience to another (as though what they experienced is *like* this other experience that the story encapsulates). Rather, the story and the experience are a unity, a unified perception in which we participate as we read. The story, therefore, becomes the myth, its language is mythic language, and its creation is mythopoesis. Not all storytelling is mythopoeic; not all stories that use the

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[27] *Oxford* 1306.
[28] Caird 196.
[29] Caird 196.
[30] Caird 197.

metaphor of pre-established story of myth are mythopoeic. The mythopoeic reinterprets the myth, creating a new whole.

The Classical Connection

The attempt to find the traces and influence of classicism in the works of H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf, seems almost an artificial exercise, like fitting a square peg into a round hole. In so many ways, these three modernist authors epitomize the movement away from the classical. In their work, there is no one answer, no definitive perfection. Truth takes many and various forms. Closure is not inevitable. The hero resides within and man, not God, is paramount. However, it was not until I began to look at the extent to which these authors were classically trained and aware that I realized the ironic dimensions of their work. Approaching these works from a classical perspective has opened a window on them; the debt should be acknowledged. As M.I. Finley points out, "Legacy implies values; it is always selective, that is to say, there is also rejection, non-legacy, and there is unending adaptation, modification, distortion."[31] H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf have put their classical awareness to good use in forging creative expression for a new age.

Organization

Part One discusses the historical background of the concepts and rhetorical devices with which this study is concerned. It is divided into two sections, the first of which looks at the importance of the Bible as the transmitter of rhetorical strategies. Its premise is the question of how classical and Judaeo-Greco strategies and concepts came to be available to twentieth

century writers. This research establishes links such as the specific use of irony in the Bible to support the resistance of the Jewish people against tyranny.

The second section discusses the nineteenth century heritage which most influenced H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf. Beginning with the important nineteenth century concept of the exiled state of mind, this section traces major conceptual developments such as the myth of the hero, occultism, the sublime experience, Nietzsche's sense of the 'free spirit', and Gothicism, especially as they pertain to the writers in this study.

Part Two is the heart of the study: discussion of specific authors and specific rhetorical strategies. The first section discusses the metaphysical metaphor employed by Virginia Woolf. This section comprises two discussions, the first of which looks at Woolf's sense of the metaphysical. Her understanding of the limits of knowledge is contrasted with that of the philosopher Bertrand Russell, who was eminently Platonic in his approach, positing knowledge to be impersonal and 'purely contemplative.' Woolf championed a concept new to her time: the viability of knowledge brought by the senses. *Mrs. Dalloway* expresses and performs Woolf's sense of the limits of knowledge and the dimensions of what is real through metaphor and narrative strategies.

The second discussion builds upon what we know of Woolf's concept of what is real. It argues that literary Gothic conventions perpetuate Judaeo-Greco concerns of the rational versus the irrational, the expansion of personal

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[31] *The Legacy of Greece* 21.

consciousness, resistance, and anti-establishment championing of the individual. The use of the Gothic in the short stories "A Haunted House," "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," and "The Legacy" establishes the ironic rhetorical structure with which Woolf pushes the metaphysical envelope.

The next section focuses on the rhetorical structure of coded language. It comprises two discussions, both of which are concerned with H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*. The first discussion addresses the importance of transformation and displacement in the development of coded language. The poem clearly has its roots in classical literature as it is a reworking of a classical story. More than this, I contend, the rhetorical strategy of coded language is classical in origin. The argument discussion establishes the mythopoeic dimension of the poem, as well as H.D.'s possible motivation for using such rhetoric, her Moravian heritage. I argue that the *eidolon* version of the myth of Helen of Troy allows the entrance of the intertext with Gnostic/Moravian belief.

The second discussion analyzes the ironic dimension of the poem. The traditional Gnostic myths of the gnosis of the world-order, the Anthropos myth, and the myth of the redemption of Sophia can be seen to underlie the classical myth of Helen.

The final section has only one discussion: a look at the rhetoric of magic in D.H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*. Arguably an attempt to reread this difficult, mystical work as a success rather than a failure, it is the one modernist piece in this study which shows no outward trace of its classical roots. The mysticism it builds upon is occult in the sense that the novel self-

consciously breathes new life into the ancient Aztec god, Quetzalcoatl. Most importantly for this study, the rhetoric is ironic; the ironic component leads us full circle to the rhetoric of magic of Jewish mysticism. I show some of the traces of Kabbalah in the novel, which appropriately both articulates and enacts the mystical experience. The burden of proof comes to rest in the hymns of Quetzalcoatl, where the attributes of Merkabah, the mystical hymns which describe the place from whence God comes as well as the realm of heavenly activity not normally seen by the average person, are most logically detected. Use of Kabbalah suggests that Lawrence saw language itself as having restorative properties for an ailing world.

# Part One: Background

## I. The Bible as Rhetorical Transmitter

Since most of the rhetorical devices with which we are concerned in this study are found in the books of the Bible, and the Bible has been the main transmitter, to the culture of the British Isles as well as that of America, of both the rhetorical devices and the ideology to which they give form, an overview of the biblical context is germane. H.D., Woolf, and Lawrence make use of figurative language that was available to them in the twentieth century because of the transmission of the Bible. Lawrence's use of Kabbalah operates beneath the surface of the text, as metaphoric magic. Metaphor, metonymy, the language of myth, pseudepigraphy, coded language, and irony are all rhetorical devices which were available to the modernists through their acquaintance with the Bible.

The history of the writing of the Bible[1] reveals the ways in which disparate cultures have come together in the development of the Christian West.[2] The melding of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin was not always smooth. There were numerous ways for meaning to change from one version of a book of the Bible to another. As G. B. Caird points out, "The history of the Old Testament [priesthood] is a complex story in which many influences, social, ideological and technological combined to produce semantic change."[3]

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[1] I am referring specifically to the Authorized King James Version.
[2] See C.H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954), Edward R. Bevans and Charles Singer, eds., *The Legacy of Israel* (1927; Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), Amos Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (N.Y.: Harper, 1950) [which makes a plea for the recognition of the poetic nature of eschatalogical language], Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trs. Jules L. Moreau (1960; N.Y.: Norton, 1970).
[3] G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) 69-70.

Frequently, one metaphor would supersede another in the process of translation, thus subtly altering the text. Caird mentions that "the Greek Job introduces allusion to Greek mythology: in 41:22, where the Hebrew has a most obscure description of the crocodile, the Greek calls it a dragon 'with all the gold of the sea beneath it.' The Greek Proverbs makes allusions to Greek poetry and sometimes substitutes Greek maxims for those of the original."[4]

The Authorized Version of the Holy Scriptures, "known popularly as the King James Bible,"[5] was first published in 1611, translated from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Translators since then have relied upon "a variety of ancient versions of the Hebrew Scriptures,"[6] as well as the Septuagint (Greek) Version of the Old Testament and the Latin Vulgate. The King James New Testament "was based on the traditional text of the Greek-speaking churches, first published in 1516, and later called the Textus Receptus or Received Text."[7] The Bible in Greek,[8] called the Septuagint (LXX),

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[4] Caird 124-125.
[5] *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997) viii.
[6] *The Nelson Study Bible* xi.
[7] *The Nelson Study Bible* xi.
[8] See Caird:

> Throughout the Old Testament period Israel had cultural links both with Egypt and with Mesopotamia, where different languages were spoken. After the conquests of Alexander the Great (334-323 BC), Greek became the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean, including many independent states.... Among the Jews there were Hebrews and Hellenists, i.e. some whose native language was Aramaic and some whose native language was Greek.
>
> .... The Greek of the New Testament is part of the *koine*, the vernacular of the Eastern Empire, which was spoken even in Rome itself.... For the Palestinian Jew Greek was a second language, and even the Jews of the Dispersion, for whom Greek was the first or only language, lived in close enclaves, associating mainly with one another, and hearing week by week the Scriptures read in the Greek version we know as the Septuagint. Early in the third century B.C., less than fifty years after Greek became the official language of Egypt, the Jews of Alexandria began translating their Hebrew Scriptures into Greek: first came the Pentateuch, then other books followed, until by New Testament times the process was almost complete. Many hands were involved in the work, with many different styles of translation. But all of these are what we should

"consisted of translations of the Hebrew books made at Alexandria at different dates beginning from the middle of the 3rd century B.C. Originating thus before the Jewish canon was finally fixed [the Ben Asher text became the only recognized form of the Hebrew Scriptures in the twelfth century], it had admitted of books – those we call the "Apocrypha' or Deuterocanonical – some of them translations from the Hebrew or Aramaic, and some of them originally Greek."[9]

This necessarily brief overview of the complex history of the Bible serves to remind us of the importance of the Hebraic idiom in Biblical language. "The principle mark...of Hebrew and especially of classical Hebrew style is that it is what the Greeks called *lexis eiromene* 'speech strung together' like a row of beads."[10] This is the mark of *parataxis*, which is the 'placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation between them.'[11] Caird mentions that Classical Greek and Latin are "severely hypotactical languages," which make the logical connections clear, whereas Biblical Hebrew is paratactical.[12] Paratactical thinking allows two different and even contradictory ideas to be set in close proximity to one another. Parataxis can be seen as the essential

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call literal, i.e. translated word by word and retaining a good deal of the syntax, idiom and general flavour of the Hebrew original. Many of the Greek words used were not exact equivalents of the Hebrew, and so came to acquire new shades of meaning. (34-36)

[9] Charles Gore, "The Bible in the Church," *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture including the Apocrypha*, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume ( London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928) 2.

[10] G.R. Driver, *The People of the Book*, cited in Caird 117. Caird is objecting to Driver's suggestion that the classical Hebrew style precludes sustained argument.

[11] OED, cited in Caird 117.

[12] Caird 117.

contained by a single word or phrase, which is how it operates in the language of all three of the writers in this study. Both H.D. and Lawrence created an ironic space that could contain an entire subtext of thought – the subtext being Gnosticism for H.D. and Kabbalah for Lawrence – in such close proximity with another, separate idea – the classical myth of Helen for H. D. and the Aztec myth of Quetzalcoatl for Lawrence – as to be almost undetectable.

The Judaic origins of the Bible have led to much of its language being vivid and poetic: imagistic, allegorical, allusive, and metaphoric, to name but a few. The process of translating the Hebrew books into Greek resulted in the translators finding the nearest equivalents to the Hebrew figurative language in the Greek language, which often meant drawing upon the mythic and metaphoric traditions of ancient Greece as opposed to the logical, philosophical traditions. In later years, Christian schools supported the teaching of 'pagan' literature because they recognized that a familiarity with the language and imagery of Greco-Roman literature enabled a clearer understanding of the language and imagery of the Bible.

A distinctive feature of the Judaic use of figurative language is the extent to which it employs tropes – 'figures of speech which consists in the use of a word or phrase in a sense other than that which is proper to it' (OID). Rather than embellishment, the figurative language is used ironically, to say one thing and mean another. For the Jews facing systematic persecution, tropism enabled the communication of a will to resist the persecutors. G. B Caird mentions that the Book of Daniel "was a tract for the encouragement of

the resistance movement" against Antiochus Epiphanes, "who at the time of writing (c. 167 B.C.) was attempting to eradicate the Jewish religion by systematic persecution."[13]

Resistance is a value system, a way of looking at the world. It performs as a cultural stance, a frame of reference, and the initiator of distinct values that govern behaviour. The attitude expresses itself as resistance to an overwhelmingly dominant cultural stance, resistance to bullying by some powerful force, resistance to silencing mechanisms in society, resistance to being the butt of prejudice, resistance to the exclusivity of hierarchy, framing, and strict binaries. That the authors in this study should have had the need to employ rhetoric that enabled an ironic, resistant stance speaks to some condition in their society that, they felt, muted their voices. This study will not express what that condition was (or those conditions, most likely), but it will attempt to show the presence of ironic trope in the works of H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf.

The Bible, then, can be seen as a primary source for the figurative language employed by H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf. The Bible provided the model for the subtle use of language as ironic trope. It was also a natural source of figurative language appropriate to the expression of transcendent experience. Even when the author is consciously eschewing Christianity, as Lawrence did in *The Plumed Serpent*, the legacy of the Bible is such that the rhetorical devices with which to express the new vision are still culled from it.

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[13] Caird 228.

# II: The Nineteenth Century Heritage

The nineteenth century saw a classical revival in which the interest in and the influence of ancient Greece grew out of all proportion, beyond what can be explained by the caprice of popular culture. So central was it to the way in which the English defined themselves that attempts to reform the educational system failed because of the strong, distinct bias towards a classical curriculum – even late in the century.

Many years later, Virginia Woolf was to write a reaction to the English identification with 'things Greek': "Germans are tourists and Frenchmen are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks." One of the characters concludes that Greek "can mean in short all that we do not know ... all that we dream and desire."[1] Artemis Leontis translates this into postmodern discourse: "'Greek' finally functions as a sign around which English society can organize itself: high culture, educational system, and rhetoric of superiority over other nations."[2] Woolf has put her finger on the essence of the Hellenic revival of the nineteenth century: a *topos*, a sign.

H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf all built upon the literary and philosophical traditions of the 19th century. The heritage is sometimes direct, as with Woolf's use of literary gothicism and H.D.'s use of a continuing interest in Greek myth. We see an entire thrust of thinking developing out of 19th century interests, namely the occult leanings of both H.D. and Lawrence. Even Woolf's creative reaction to the limits of the knowable develops out of the tension between conservative medical practice and the philosophical

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[1]Virginia Woolf, "A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus," ed. S.P. Rosenbaum, *Times Literary Supplement* (11-17 Sept. 1987) 979.

search for knowledge which characterized the 19th century. In this chapter, we will look at specific aspects of the 19th century classical revival which influenced the work of H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf.

One possible reason for the surge of interest in 'things Greek is that, in the chaotic, expanding, bewildering universe of 19th century England, the classical past provided stability through an iterable set of values, a common referent and an ethos which was comfortable with the nationalist yet expansionist fervor of the time. Leontis asks the question, "How does an emergent nation use the past to create a homeland?"[3], and responds with *topos*: "In ancient Greek rhetoric, *topos* represented a site of learning to which speakers returned again and again for reliable phrases, expressions, and motifs."[4] Classicism[5] was the *topos* through which the English defined themselves. It became "the territory of a utopian homeland – an otherwise 'empty' space, unoccupied, at least in the imagination of the diaspora, by any other inhabitants -- … a gathering place."[6]

The 'Exiled' State of Mind

Such a gathering place was necessary for reasons distinct to the English nation in the 19th century. First, the English felt exiled and disenfranchised by the events of their century.[7] In this environment, classicism

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[2]Artemis Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1995) 110.
[3] Leontis 35.
[4] Leontis 18.
[5] Classicism is defined here in its broadest sense as an entire Greco-Roman inheritance, or Hellenism. The emphasis shifted during the 19th century from the Roman to the Greek, from Virgil to Homer.
[6] Leontis 35.
[7] Many of the English people were scattered across the globe because of colonialism and the expanding empire. Those who remained in England felt like foreigners in their own

allowed for the concept of a connecting truth, an imaginative permanency behind the changing world. The classical world provided a ready-made symbolic homeland with which the English could identify in the midst of their physical, scientific, and technological upheavals, a homeland with the spiritual depth that the so-called 'real' world lacked. G.B. Caird claims that similar exilic circumstances gave rise to specific metaphoric use of language in the Old Testament.[8] The metaphoric language that arose through the 19th century classical revival had its impetus in the exiled state of mind. H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf were all dealing with some personal sense of exile. This state of mind gave rise to an 'occult' project, reaching back to a past system of thought and belief and recreating it for the modern world.

The Hero and the Growth of Individualism

The *topos* created by the exiled state of mind is strong and dynamic – a place in which the individual can overcome the weakening, disenfranchising

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homeland, so rapid and invasive were the changes brought about by industrialization. Within a short period, the entire landscape of England changed. Railways were laid all across the land; huge factories were built to handle the lucrative cotton-spinning; gaslight lit up the night sky as the factories worked day and night; hundreds and thousands of people huddled in newly-formed towns around the place of work, living in squalor, working long hours in poor conditions. Crime escalated with the rapid growth in population. There were "220 criminal offences ... punishable by the death penalty and mass executions were common" (Bowen 167). Life was brutal and cheap. As late as the 1880s, the average life expectancy of a female was forty-four years. Surgery meant death by infection, and the list of 'leading causes of death' is long: consumption, pneumonia, infant cholera, measles, cancer, typhoid fever, diphtheria, croup, bronchitis, whooping cough, and scarlet fever. See James Bowen, "Education, ideology and the ruling class: Hellenism and English public schools in the nineteenth century" in *Rediscovering Hellenism*, ed. G.W. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 161-186. See also Carol Dougherty, *The Poetics of Colonization* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993); Richard Flaste, *Medicine's Great Journey* (Toronto: Little, Brown, 1992); Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* (London: Phoenix, 1991); Bernard Herbert Stern, *The Rise of Romantic Hellenism in English Literature 1732-1786* (New York: Octagon, 1969).

[8] Caird notes that use of myth in the Old Testament to argue "for a particular theological interpretation of current events, and ... so attempt[ing] to influence the history of [the Jewish]

effects of rapid change in industrializing England. The need for an ethos of strength found its complement in the concept of the hero that is so strong in ancient Greek myth. One participated vicariously in an empowered experience through the myths of the heroes. The heroes were strong and vital; they took part in otherworldly adventures similar to the bewildering realities met by the colonialists; they were fiercely individualistic.

Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" touches upon the paradoxes of this new heroic age. One risks being a 'victim' in the foreign land in which one travels. Suspicion of strangers, an inherent xenophobia, is echoed in the opening lines: "My first thought was, he lied in every word, / That hoary cripple, with malicious eye / Askance to watch the working of his lie" (ll. 1-3). When he reaches the Tower he meets "the lost adventurers his peers" (XXXIII, l.3): "I saw them and I knew them all" (XXXIV, 1.4). The unknown becomes the familiar; the foreign land becomes peopled with familiar faces.[9]

Tennyson's "Ulysses" expresses the intellectual spirit of his own age rather than the Homeric story: "I am become a name; / For always roaming with a hungry heart / Much have I seen and known, -- cities of men / And manners, climates, councils, governments" (ll. 11-14). This Ulysses has come home and is now looking to be off again: "this gray spirit yearning in desire /

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people" occurs in the "exilic or post-exilic period" (229-30). G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980).

[9] Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," *Hero's Way*, ed. John Alexander Allen (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 11-18.

To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought" (ll. 30-32).[10]

Charles Segal comments that, "The notion of the hero ... is the center of one of the most powerful clusters of ideas that Greek culture has bequeathed to Western literature and art. It is also a principal target of a major movement in contemporary criticism which seeks to replace the person with the discourse of the person and to deconstruct the individual into mental categories, strategies of representation, and linguistic forms."[11] The nineteenth century heroic ideal had the effect of replacing the Greek heroic discourse with the specifics of individualism. As Segal notes: "the hero, unprotected by religious orthodoxy or dogmatic faith, confronts the ultimate questions of life in the largest terms, experiences the deepest sense of self in isolation and suffering, and refuses to constrict the greatness of his nature and ideals to suit convention and so-called normality."[12]

The 'Homeric Question', which so fascinated the nineteenth century, is directly connected with this heroic sense of the individual. The question concerned whether or not Homer was illiterate and therefore whether the epics could possibly have been a series of shorter poems that were united at a later date.[13] People were generally excited to think that such work could be

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[10] Lord Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses," *Hero's Way*, ed. John Alexander Allen (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 109-110.
[11] Charles Segal, "Introduction," in Cedric H. Whitman, *The Heroic Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 2.
[12] Segal 3.
[13] Robert Wood, in his *Essay of the Original Genius of Homer* (1769), first suggested Homer's illiteracy. See Bernard Knox, *The Oldest Dead White European Males* (New York: Norton, 1993) 9.

"untutored genius."[14] Knox contends they much preferred a primitive Homer to a cultivated one.

Primitive versus cultivated is only one reading of this issue. The concepts of progress, evolution, and a clear conception that newer was better, that the passage of time brought improvement, that even our sense of honour is positively improved in a developmental sense, argue against this privileging of a primitive Homer. The idea is equally as likely to stem, not from any sense that 'untutored' was better, or that 'primitive' was superior, but from a sense that an individual who stepped outside the shackles of social conditioning was superior to a 'cultivated' lackey. The sense was of originality, individualism, and personal reality, all of which the Greek heroic ideal appeared to support. Classicism provided an adequate framework for a common *topos* of individualism.

Another paradox of the hero is the extent to which the concept of hero necessarily involved an 'other' which was an opposite. The ethos recognized and tolerated great inequities as though the heroic necessarily implied the non-heroic. Thus, the 'great intellect' of the 'more highly developed' Western mind intimated the lesser intellect of those being colonized. The 'civilizing' impulse admitted its opposite, the uncivilized. The concept of the dominance of the strong allowed for the concept of the subjugation of the weak.

Key amongst these opposites is the extent to which the heroic involved definitions of manliness. This was certainly not new to the nineteenth century:

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[14] Knox 9.

definitions of manliness have changed over time and culture. As Carolyn Williams notes:

> In Plato's *Symposium*, a dialogue on the nature of love, one speaker claims that Patroclus must have been the active partner, since Achilles was his junior, and supremely beautiful. This theory depends on the common classical assumption that homosexual relations should take place between an older, active lover ... who desires intercourse, and a younger, passive beloved ... who derives no physical pleasure from the encounter. This practice is not universally associated with effeminacy: the orator Aeschines (390-314 B.C.) finds it expedient to argue in court that men who form such bonds are more masculine than those who feel affinities with women.[15]

Williams argues that Pope's translation of *The Iliad* actively masculinizes the Homeric text: "Pope's treatment of Achilles is an attempt at rehabilitation – not only of Achilles but of Homer, whose *Iliad* is often condemned for its flawed hero."[16] Achilles' passions are carefully presented "as *manly* excess."[17]

The issue here, then, is not what the ancient Greeks saw as manly, but what the people of the nineteenth century saw as manly. The heroic age enabled a nineteenth century ethos of manliness. Classicism enables individualism and offers a touchstone for manly behaviour, in H.D.'s *Helen in*

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[15] Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer, and Manliness* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 103. See also Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1995).
[16] Williams 104.
[17] Williams 105.

*Egypt*. Though less clearly a 'classical' motif, individualism is a primary issue in Woolf. The mythical motif in Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* in no way precludes strong individualism; rather, we get a sense of the tension between the individual and the mythic realities.

Nietzsche: the Manliness of the Inward Journey

Nietzsche is recognized today as having had a profound influence on subsequent generations, including the modernists. Most germane to this discussion is the extent to which he had his finger on the pulse of his time. Nietzsche wrote, "the hero always bears the wilderness and the sacred, inviolable borderline within him wherever he may go."[18] This sense of the inner self, the inner wilderness that is part of one, was the essence of the manly ethos of the age. The hero became the outward manifestation of the inward self, the hero's adventure made manifest the inward journey. Romanticism and the privileging of the emotions, the need to express the affective self, were in no way seen as feminizing, but rather as masculine and heroic acts. As with Plato, the person who made consciousness and understanding his life's goal – the philosopher – was of the highest order of people. Nietzsche referred to this use of Hellenism[19] as "*The Greeks as interpreters*":

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[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trs. Marion Farber (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984) 392. See also C.G. Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939*, Vol. 1, ed. James L. Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988); A.H.J. Knight, *Some Aspect of the Life and Work of Nietzsche, and particularly of his connection with Greek Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1933); Ofelia Schutte, "Nietzsche's Psychology of Gender Difference" in *Modern Engendering*, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On (N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1994) 231-245.

[19] As we see from Nietzsche, the nineteenth century Hellenic revival offered a very particular view of the Greek classical legacy.

> When we speak of the Greeks, we involuntarily speak of today and yesterday: their familiar history is a polished mirror that always radiates something that is not in the mirror itself. We employ our freedom to speak of them so as to be allowed to remain silent about others – so that the latter may now say something into the thoughtful reader's ear. Thus, the Greeks make it easier for modern man to communicate much that is delicate and hard to communicate.[20]

Nietzsche's reputation is largely that of "a rather unorthodox writer who called into question important dogmas in the Western tradition."[21] He had a deep "appreciation of the profound and extensive consequences of the collapse of traditional ways of thinking" as well as a sense of the "insufficiency of the resources of both the Enlightenment and the Romanticism to which he had been attracted to fill the void."[22] Most central to Nietzsche's break with tradition was the extent to which he turned to the ancient Greek culture for guidance and insight: "Both those spirits of a classical and those of a romantic bent – these two species exist at all times – entertain a vision of the future: but the former do so out of a *strength* of their age, the latter out of its *weakness*."[23]

Nietzsche was a classicist, a professor of classical philology for a short while, who "was ill (often violently ill) more days than he was well. He was nearly blind at the age of thirty-five: he was lonely, unpopular, unsuccessful,

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[20] Nietzsche, *Human, Part One: 218*, 264.
[21] Schutte 231.
[22] Richard Schacht, *Classical Modern Philosophers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) vii.

poor: no one understood him, and no one was interested in his work: he had every reason to believe that he had completely failed: finally he went mad,"[24] in 1888, at the age of 44.

He upheld the classical view that philosophy and politics represent "some of the highest activities that the human being can accomplish in society."[25] At the same time, he championed the 'free spirit' – an idea particularly attractive to the nineteenth century mind: "He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him. He is the exception, the fettered spirits are the rule."[26] His sense of what constitutes a 'free spirit' was rooted in Hellenic ideas and values. To Nietzsche, the unexamined life was *tradition.* (Socrates, of course, held that the unexamined life was not worth living.) Thus, to examine life was to go beyond tradition. However, you can break from tradition and still hold to *convention*: "For conventions are the *achieved* artistic means, the toilsomely acquired common language, through which the artist can truly *communicate* himself to the understanding of his audience."[27] He was a champion of classical education as "a higher gymnastics for the head."[28] He understood Greek culture as "a masculine culture."[29] The paradox

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[23] Nietzsche, *Human, Part Two: 217*, 366.
[24] Knight 165.
[25] Schutte 234.
[26] Nietzsche, *Human, Part One: 225*, 108.
[27] Nietzsche, *Human, Part Two, 122*, 339.
[28] Nietzsche, *Human, Part One, 266*, 126.
[29] Nietzsche, *Human, Part One, 259*, 121.

of the heroic ethos meant, for Nietzsche as for the ancient Greeks, that women were made 'other.'[30]

Nietzsche's sense of the Apollonian/Dionysian split reflects his sense of the tension which existed in his time between rationality and the creativity which would be essential for mythopoesis. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Dionysus is the wild, uncivilizable spirit.[31] Nietzsche turned to ancient Greece not for its cool, levelheaded rationalism, but for its passion and intensity. "He held that the essence of Greek art was misrepresented as calm, impassive, statuesque. It grew, he believed, out of a tension.... It was the result of the artistic sense working, not on a neutral material, but on savage subconscious urges.... the products of violent conflict ... not serene repose but a hard-earned victory."[32]

Nietzsche's sense of passion and violence can be seen in Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*, as can his sense of the 'free spirit' who goes against the expected norms of his/her culture and class. *Helen in Egypt* presents a remarkably similar struggle, removed from immediacy by the familiarity of the story of Helen of Troy, a kind of pseudepigraphy. It is Nietzschean in its violence and passion, as well as in its search for understanding. Woolf also reaches for understanding in a passionate and personal way.

Nietzsche represents that which the nineteenth century bequeathed to the twentieth. The criticism which he had for his own society – the ideas which continued to ring true decades after he wrote them – came from his

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[30] A pervasive idea throughout the 19th century, this concept continued strong into the 20th century, reinforced by psychoanalysis and depth psychology, as well as myth theory. See Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, trs. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1955).
[31] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

profound respect for the wisdom of the classical world, and especially of the ancient Greeks. For Nietzsche, as for many others in the nineteenth century, classicism was a *topos* around which ideas could organize.

Sappho: The Expression of Passionate Instincts

Nietzsche's sense of the coexistence of the Apollonian/Dionysian spirit, and of the Romantic/Classical spirit, is nowhere as clear as in the reception given the Greek poet Sappho, who became an "international cult"[33] in part because she epitomized the expression of passionate instincts. Some of her notoriety was due to an invented story of her "unhappy affair with Phaon and her subsequent suicide," which was the invention of the dramatists of the New Comedy."[34] Nonetheless, her poetry was seen as raw, unmediated by the rational, expressing "sensuous frankness." [35]

Pain penetrates

Me drop

by drop[36]

That her passions were not confined to the heterosexual mould was seen as being more in touch with her true and real nature. Her poetry was seen as expressing the otherwise hidden inner self, without conceit, device or shield. This was the attraction of the so-called 'primitive' to the Romantic mind.

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[32] Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford UP, 1959) 460.
[33] Peter Tomory, "The Fortunes of Sappho," *Rediscovering Hellenism*, ed. G. W. Clarke (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1989) 124.
[34] Tomory 122.
[35] Tomory 124.
[36] Sappho, *Sappho*, trs. Mary Barnard (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1958) 61.

Sappho's poetics spoke to the time. Their personal vision was in tune with the growing emphasis on the individual. Their passion stood in stark contrast to the rational and scientific movements of the age. Their fragmentary nature reflected the nature of most nineteenth-century experience.

Even as Sappho was objectified as passion, she was also proof of a female poetic identity. The history of how much of her work failed to survive the book-burning of the early Christian era fueled the growing feminist anger against the patriarchal society, which was seen to have oppressed and silenced women for so long. Sappho materialized Greek womanhood, and through this all womanhood in this *topos* of renewal. Later, modernists such as Amy Lowell and H.D. would reread and recreate Sappho: imagism and tight, lyrical verse would express what other eras had marginalized.

The Sublime Experience

The nineteenth century sense of the sublime had a profound effect upon H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf. The sublime experience was one of expanding consciousness, progression, and limitless possibilities. Centuries earlier, Longinus taught that skill in invention and ordering of the parts of the whole are important in writing, but that sublimity, "flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt."[37] Kant, in 1790, explained the sublime as boundless, formless and beyond cognition – the faculty of mind that surpasses sense and imagination. Kant posited that the *a priori* of consciousness is time and space: that we cannot be conscious except

[37] Longinus, "On the Sublime," *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 79.

through the ordering lens of time-space perceptions. In these terms, sublimity is that which reaches beyond Kant's *a priori* of consciousness.[38] The 19th century focus on sublimity begins the process of pushing the envelope of the 'real' which we see in the modernists.

Part of the impetus for this state of mind may well have been the extensive use of opium[39] which, in spite of its drawbacks, was widely associated with both clarity of mind and depth of imagination. In 1822 De Quincey wrote:

> But the main distinction lies in this – that, whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium on the contrary (if taken in a proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession; opium sustains and reinforces it ... opium ... communicates serenity and equipoise to all the faculties, active or passive; and, with respect to the temper and moral feelings in general, it gives simply that sort of vital warmth which is approved by the judgment ... the opium-eater ... feels that the

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[38] Immanuel Kant, "From Critique of Judgment,"*Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 376-393.

[39] See Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, *Opium and the People* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1981). Until 1868 there were no restrictions whatsoever on the importation, wholesaling and retailing of opium. In fact, the import duty, which was in effect in the first half of the century, was completely abolished in 1860, resulting in greater availability of less costly opium. In England, the drug was sold mainly over the counter, rather than by doctor's prescription, there being a long tradition of self-medication. 20-25 drops (1 grain) could be bought for a penny. The drug was included in tea, cough drops, tonics, suppositories, toothache remedies, baby-soothers, and was used as a remedy for rheumatism, dysentery, cholera, headaches, stomach cramps, women's ailments, menopause, ulcers, bruises, as well as to counteract excessive drinking. Opium was added to beer, to brandy, and to children's cordials. It was a standard component in every home's medicine chest. With such widespread application, it would have been a wonder if anyone in England had not taken opium many times in his or her life. At the very least, the culture of opium use and the state of mind which

> diviner part of his nature is paramount – that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity, and high over all the great light of majestic intellect. [40]

Virginia Woolf could not write an opium-like experience and have it be respected as insight into the mystic cosmos. In the 20th century it becomes an experience of madness. So strong was the 19th century sense of expanded consciousness that, when Darwin postulated that "the acquisition of an upright posture, not the achievement of a threshold in mental development, was the key step in human origins,"[41] he was ignored: an upright posture was too prosaic an answer.

Unlike Kant, for whom the sublime was beyond cognition and certainly not experiential, the sublime was an experience that was achievable for the people of the 19th century – it was rooted in the real.

Paul Roubiczek argues that an almost complete split between the spiritual and the material characterized the 19th century:

> It is Romanticism which forces man, throughout almost the whole century, to choose between the spiritual and the material. The romantic betrayal of the spirit avenges itself upon man, for now it is hardly possible any longer to further that reconciliation of the spirit with early life which Kant and Goethe had almost completed; the ideal and the real are altogether estranged. The human mind, whether it despises

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nearly everyone would have partaken of at least once in his or her life would have contributed to this overall sense of "the great light of the majestic intellect."

[40] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822; London: Oxford UP, 1960) 201-203.

> reality or whether it is searching for it, has lost contact with the world, and those men who feel themselves inextricably involved with real life have no alternative but to surrender unconditionally to the purely material.[42]

He is right to point out the estrangement, but only in terms of equating 'classical ideal' with 'spiritual'. The 19th century classical revival reinterpreted and re-rooted the classical ideal, replacing it with a full reality: the sublime, which could be experienced. Mystic occultism, which we see in the modernists, has its impetus in this realizable, experiential, sense of the sublime.

19th Century Occultism: H.D. and Lawrence

Leon Surette is quick to point out that the occult is more than the often disreputable poltergeists, mediums, seances, and spiritism. It is more the "enterprise of assembling the fragments of a lost faith."[43] H.D.'s approach to the occult was most directly an attempt to revivify an almost lost faith, Moravianism. We can clearly see the ways in which she drew on texts which "have a very long history in Western literary culture."[44] Surette goes on to say that "Occultism sees itself as the heir of an ancient wisdom – either passed on from adept to adept or rediscovered in each new generation by mystical illumination."[45]

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[41] Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: the Victorians and the Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 97.
[42] Paul Roubiczek, *The Misinterpretation of Man* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1947) 82.
[43] Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1993) 5.
[44] Surette 7.
[45] Surette 7.

> The touchstone for the occult is neither mysticism (which it shares with most world religions) nor, of course, a belief in the divine (which it shares with all religions) but rather a belief that throughout human history certain individuals have had intimate contact with the divine and from this contact have gained special knowledge (wisdom, or gnosis), which they have preserved in a form comprehensible only to the already enlightened and which is passed on in texts whose esoteric interpretation is preserved by secret societies. [46]

The occultism of both H.D. and Lawrence partakes of this kind of knowledge; the texts that we study here bear the marks of such preserved knowledge and are therefore part of the occult tradition. R. Laurence Moore expands the definition of 'genuine occult' to include the recovery of "lost knowledge about the universal mysteries of cosmic order and oneness,"[47] a definition which more effectively includes Lawrence's work, which does not seek to revive any specific lost religion.

The tradition was necessarily inherited from the 19th century. The line of initiation[48] was maintained through religious fringe groups such as the Moravians, through institutions such as the Order of the Golden Dawn, through populist movements which spearheaded revival of interest in mythology, and through the preserved knowledge of Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah.

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[46] Surette 13-14.
[47] R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows* (N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1977) 6.

Popular manifestations of a continuing interest in the occult came largely in the form of spiritism with its attendant seances, table rapping, levitation, and so forth.[49] Moore argues that spiritualism disassociated itself from the occult tradition of secrecy during the 19th century, in a self-conscious effort to join the stream of empirical science through observable and verifiable experiments.[50] This 'observable' spiritualism, Surette argues, has sullied our sense of the occult and made it a 'questionable' pursuit.[51] This perception, in turn, has caused scholars to approach the topic with great caution, when they have not avoided it altogether as unfit for serious pursuit. "The scandal is not that scholars have dared to suggest that canonized authors such as Conrad, Yeats, Lawrence, Pound, Eliot, and Stevens ... were tainted by occult influences. On the contrary, the scandal is scholarship's long-standing avoidance of the topic... Literary scholars have long been joined together in an exercise of damage control on the issue of Yeats's occultism as they have

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[48] Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, trs. William Weaver (N.Y.: Ballantine, 1988) performs a tracing of secret knowledge imaginatively through the order of the Templars. The line of initiation is key; the novel hypothesizes the gravity of a break in this line.

[49] A large body of literature surveys this particular 19th century interest (obsession). See especially Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows* (N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1977); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Katherine H. Porter, *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1958).

[50] Moore 7.

[51] Surette writes, "The occult, alas, is full of ideas to which few educated men and women could subscribe. However, we shall discover that not all occultists are habitually engaged in conversing with ghosts and demons, transmigrating from Dublin to Tibet, running naked in the moonlight, or signing pacts with the devil, as Hollywood and pulp fiction would lead one to believe. But it must be admitted that such perceptions of the occult are supported by the behaviour of some prominent occultists, the most notorious perhaps being Josephin Peladan, Mme Blavatsky, and Aleister Crowley. (10-11)

for Pound's fascism."[52] For our purposes, H.D. can be seen as a bridge between Pound and Lawrence: fundamental interest in the occult is something they all shared and H.D., of course, knew both men.

19th Century Gothic: Woolf

Many of the concerns of 19th century neo-classicism are to be found in literary Gothicism. The Gothic hero, like the Greek heroic figure, "experiences the deepest sense of self in isolation," as Segal noted.[53] The Gothic hero copes with a sense of exile and the disturbance of known traditions and values, a state of being that was familiar to the 19th century sensibility, as we have seen. The genre enters the realm of the unknown, often exploring the realm of death, affirming a spiritual aspect to life. It pushes the envelope of the 'real', which was the quintessential sublime experience of the 19th century, and a rediscovery of the classical 'ideal'. Literary Gothicism is essentially a popular form of the classical revival as it preserves in its conventions values and concerns which can be traced back to ancient Greece.

Literary Gothicism dates from about the second quarter of the eighteenth century (although, of course, Gothic sensibility predates the eighteenth century, just as works that are essentially Gothic are being produced today).[54] By the time Virginia Woolf came to write, over 150 years of Gothic-style fiction had been written, with one of the classics, *Dracula*,

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[52] Surette 8-9.
[53] Segal 3.
[54] See Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination* (London: Assoc. Univ. Press, 1982), 19-20. See also George E. Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989); Cyndy Hendershot. *The Animal Within* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (London: Methuen, 1986).

having been produced just a few years earlier (1897). This long history of familiarity with the elements of Gothicism enabled Woolf to harness the style without actually writing a Gothic novel.

As Eve Sedgwick points out, the Gothic novel is "pervasively conventional":

> Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind (and you can tell that from the title), you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty. You know the important feature of its *mise en scéne*: an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know about the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover....You know something about the novel's form: it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories. You also know that, whether with more or less relevance to the main plot, certain characteristic preoccupations will be aired. These include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past;

> Faust- and Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires; the charnel house and the madhouse.[55]

Sedgwick poses the question as to why all of these conventions are found together in the Gothic novel, and she questions why it took so long for "one and another of the conventions to become disentangled from the formula and available to other novelistic traditions."[56] Key to this study is the way in which the modernists, and especially Virginia Woolf, used certain of the Gothic conventions – most notably those that touched upon the supernatural, ghosts, subterranean passages, and the link between life and death. Sarah Leeson, a character in Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Dead Secret* (1857), raises the question of the possible interrelationship between life and death:

> 'Are there lonely hours,' she went on, still never looking away from the corner, still not seeming to hear him, 'when you are sometimes frightened without knowing why, -- frightened all over in an instant, from head to foot? Tell me, uncle, have you ever felt the cold steal round and round the roots of your hair, and crawl bit by bit down your back? I have felt that, even in the summer. I have been out of doors, alone on a wide heath, in the heat and brightness of noon, and have felt as if chilly fingers were touching me – chilly, damp, softly-creeping fingers. It says in the New Testament that the dead came once out of

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[55] Segwick 9-10.
[56] Sedwick 11.

their graves, and went into the holy city. The dead! Have they rested, rested always, rested for ever, since that time?'[57]

Virginia Woolf also felt that cold chill on a warm afternoon, a feeling that she harnesses the Gothic conventions to express, even though the source of the feeling differs from that of the relative simplicity of the Gothic tradition. Whereas the Gothic raises the question, in an increasingly scientific age, of life-after-death, Woolf's use of the Gothic conventions materializes the dimensionality of life-in-life.

The predictable conventions of Gothic literature enable ideas to materialize with the fewest possible words, a kind of shorthand that equally frames the reader's predicted/predictable response. The reader's comfort level is therefore high, given the measure of predictability in the genre. The same is possibly true of the writer, who does not need to impose control upon an unruly subject when the form and content so dominate. Woolf's use of the Gothic thus emerges as a means of framing and communicating. Like a painter who subtly re-visions traditional icons, Woof's vision is communicable within the convention, and in the changes she affords. Kristeva's sense of jouissance in abjection[58] sheds light upon Woolf's artistry. Woolf's demarcation of abjection differs from Kristeva in lacking a sense of fear and loathing, a sense that, I contend, is inherent in the Gothic conventions

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[57] Wilkie Collins, *The Dead Secret* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997)154-155.
[58] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trs. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1982). See also Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman (New York: Liveright Pub. Corp., 1957), and Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trs. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1989).

which frame these stories. The artist is therefore free to indulge in the performance of jouissance.

The influence of 19th century thought upon the modernists was naturally profound. Key amongst the 19th century ideas which the modernists negotiated was that of loss of faith, an issue with which Virginia Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, was known to grapple. Subsequent to loss of faith came attacks upon the Judaeo-Christian foundation of received faith, followed by the rediscovery of myth and the 'pagan' Greek world. On one hand, the mythic attests to a universal application – restores a sense of the universal that crumbled with the loss of received Judaeo-Christian faith. At the same time, ironically, the modernists found in the mythic ways to affirm the individual, the self, through a security of the universal.

## Part Two: Rhetorical Strategies

### I. Metaphysical Metaphor

#### i) Woolf's Quarrel with Russell:

#### *Mrs. Dalloway* and the Limits of Knowledge

Preface

We begin our discussion of rhetoric with Virginia Woolf because her work best illustrates the modernist attempt to establish frames and boundaries in a world without limits. The dissolution of mind which forms an intrinsic part of her work echoes the dissolution of the social framework during the Great War and its aftermath. Her attempt to cope with this state of mind offered comforting, if extended, boundaries with which to respond to the confusion of her time. By confronting the very definition of what is real, Woolf was adding her voice to a popular ancient Greek argument. The manner in which she approaches this discussion employs mythopoesis through narrative – a rhetorical strategy from the classical heritage along with the metaphysical argument it embodies.[1] There are two sections to this discussion. In the first, I discuss Woolf's concept of metaphysics, to establish the theoretical framework of what we see in her narrative strategy. In the second section, I explore explicit applications of her view of reality in three Gothic short stories, all of which support the thesis that Woolf, while pushing the

[1] Heraclitus conceptualized both a large split between the world of the senses and the reality, and the thesis that "All things are one," thereby reconciling opposites. See Merrill Ring, *Beginning with the Presocratics* (Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield, 1987) 70. Prior to him, philosophers such as Xenophanes held that we could only know through our senses; God was accepted as beyond the human sphere. Before Heraclitus, knowledge was seen to reside in sense-datum, albeit potentially inaccurately. Perspective was recognized as playing a large part in perceived realities. Mythopoesis was a privileged, respected mode of communicating knowledge, knowledge which included the nuances of human psychological and emotional being. Plato, and Socrates through him, respected philosophy as the highest of intellectual accomplishments. See E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1951), Alexander S. Kohanski, *The Greek Mode of Thought in Western Philosophy* (Toronto: Associated UP, 1984); Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (London: Macmillan, 1925); Bernard Williams, "Philosophy," *The Legacy of Greece*, ed. M.I. Finley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 202-255.

envelope of reality, paradoxically supported a reaffirmation of and repositioning of an individual self, and of a narrative authority.

This first section was originally conceived and written in the fall of 1997 for the first draft of this study. At that time, its purpose was to explore Woolf's sense of metaphysics, the philosophy of which was so important to the ancient Greeks. Her exploration of the nature of reality joins in this ancient discussion, helping to bring Greek influence into the twentieth century. I conceived of juxtaposing her thought to that of Bertrand Russell in order to illustrate how she differs, how she has pushed the envelope of reality. Russell, I felt, exemplifies a strict, idealist paradigm of reality which refuses to admit the veracity of the personal, whereas Woolf posits, paradoxically, the reality of ideas which have no relation to the outside world or any "appeal to external verities."[2] Woolf did not have a discourse readily available for expressing her thoughts, nor was she trained in mathematics and logic, as was Russell. She chose instead the rhetoric of myth, which is capable of articulating a lived experience.

I chose Russell because it was my opinion that his thought exemplified the kind of thinking with which Woolf would take umbrage. He was a 'popular' philosopher in his day, his work known in a general sense by many. Of course, he was an acquaintance of hers. He was a Don at Cambridge when her brother Thoby was there. He was a member of the Cambridge Apostles, knew Leonard Woolf, and was in love with Ottoline Morrell who was a frequent visitor to the Woolf household. He attended Bloomsbury soirees and

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[2] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 3.

has been considered, if not a member of this select group, at least on the fringe. Woolf certainly had broad opportunity to encounter Russell's thought.

Scholarship has since been published which posits Russell as a direct influence upon Woolf, goes into great detail of their acquaintanceship and similarity of thought, argues at length that she and Russell shared a way of thinking, that she echoed his vocabulary, and that his thought extended that of her father, Leslie Stephen.[3] Banfield's argument is well-informed to a degree which this essay cannot emulate; nonetheless, I beg to differ with her conclusions. The difference between us is essentially a matter of degree on points such as Russell's theory of sense-data, but the heart of this degree of difference lies precisely in the argument expounded here: that the mythopoesis of *Mrs. Dalloway* expresses, amongst its range, a lived experience of reality with no connection whatsoever to an outside shared reality. This is the one point upon which Woolf differs, and upon which I am at pains to be clear. There are 'phantom' realities, in which objects maintain existence in the ideal, as Banfield points out Russell argued and Woolf agreed. More than this, however, I contend Woolf conceived of the possibility of parallel, non-referential realities, and on this point she is unique in her thinking.

The Nature of Reality

In beginning this study with Virginia Woolf, we begin with the investigation of the nature of reality itself. To narrow the focus, I have chosen what I hope will be an accessible vehicle for addressing Woolf's ideas: a

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[3] Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000).

contrast between her thinking and that of Bertrand Russell. Writing at the same time, their concerns had common ground: the certainty of knowledge.[4] They both had the 'metaphysical attitude,' as Drennan terms it.[5] Beyond this, they part company, for Russell would never have conceded that Woolf's mind was conducive to 'unveiling' knowledge, because she admitted the personal and private into the sphere of what constitutes knowledge.

Russell clarifies his position on the value of the personal and private as *knowledge* in the following excerpt from *The Problems of Philosophy*:

> Everything, in contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object, and hence impairs the union which the intellect seeks. By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect. The free intellect will see as God might see, without a *here* and *now*, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge – knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain. Hence also the free intellect will value more the abstract

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[4] Russell wrote, "my philosophical development may be divided into various stages according to the problems with which I have been concerned and the men whose work has influenced me. There is only one constant preoccupation: I have throughout been anxious to discover how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness." *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959) 11.

[5] "What Plato and Aristotle meant by philosophic wonder could be called an intellectual attention, or a spiritual posture, that encourages what Aime Forest has called the 'unveiling' of the secrets of reality. What they were talking about was not a passing fancy but the *shape* of the mind and a way of looking at and living through life." A.D. Drennan, "The Spirit of Metaphysical Inquiry: Introduction to Part One," *Metaphysics*, A.D. Drennan, ed. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962) 3.

> and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter, than the knowledge brought by the senses, and dependent, as such knowledge must be, upon an exclusive and personal point of view and a body whose sense-organs distort as much as they reveal.[6]

According to Russell, then, knowledge, reality, resides in the impersonal, the 'purely contemplative,' eschewing 'knowledge brought by the senses.' Russell has sidestepped any inclusion of God, yet he has retained the Platonic sense of 'perfect ideas' in his "knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain."[7] He privileges a *particular* knowledge ("impersonal" and "contemplative") and suggests that here is *truth*, immutable. To this extent, Russell leans towards mysticism through his sense of 'elite' knowledge.

Russell's knowledge is that of Plato's cave: the intellect which is chained, not free, is tantamount to the human beings who have been chained since childhood in the underground den. "They see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall."[8] "Would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them? ... To them ... the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images."[9] The *free intellect*, on the other hand, has emerged from the dark into the light, and has knowledge of *reality* rather than shadows. In this paradigm of knowledge, error results from reality-testing with the senses or

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[6] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912; London: Oxford UP, 1957) 160.
[7] Russell, *Problems* 160.
[8] Plato, "Republic," *Plato*. trs. B. Jowett, ed.Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn, N.Y.: Walter J. Black, 1969) 398.
[9] Plato, "Republic" 399.

the distractions of the world: "men fight with one another about shadows only and are distracted in the struggle for power."[10] Thus, knowledge is "impersonal" and "purely contemplative."[11]

Russell's term, *free intellect*, owes a large debt to Nietzsche's concept of *free spirit*. Both are Platonic in that they involve 'elitist' knowledge. Nietzsche's *free spirit* could only be male in gender. He went so far as to say that a man who was, or aspired to be, a free spirit should keep a distance between himself and women. As Schutte notes:

> As with his earlier Apollonian/Dionysian transformations, the transfiguration taking place here [*Thus Spake Zarathustra*] excludes women, while it takes place in a space far removed from women's space.[12]

Russell has removed Nietzsche's ideas from their blatantly misogynistic sphere yet has maintained what could be called a masculinist approach. The 'women's space' is often primarily subjective. The *free intellect*, according to Russell, cannot operate in the subjective sphere; with few exceptions, this concept inherently excludes women.

Woolf's position is quite different from that of Russell, from Nietzsche, and from most of the masculine paradigms of knowledge of her time. She believes unequivocally in the reality of the personal sphere: 'truth' resides in the experience (of the senses). She contends that rational, fact-based

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[10] Plato, "Republic" 405.
[11] Russell, *Problems* 160.
[12] Ofelia Schutte, "Nietzsche's Psychology of Gender Difference," *Modern Engendering*, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1994) 242.

reality tests, such as Russell advocates, are insufficient. It is her position that the ordinary touchstones of reality which Russell and other Platonists promoted are beyond one's grasp and control, that so-called reality, so-called truth, so-called knowledge have slipped beyond one's grasp.

In holding this position, Woolf echoes what people of her time were experiencing: they were living in a maelstrom, in which "all that is solid melts into air."[13] The horrors of war, the senseless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of men, the inhumanities, were experienced as "a loss of civilization as they had known it."[14] This experience precipitated a "crisis in consciousness" (3) that is expressed metaphorically in Woolf's narratives. Woolf continues to be an important writer and thinker, more so than Russell, because we continue to be in the grip of the maelstrom.

Woolf champions the subjective space as her way of legitimizing her manic-depressive experience, through "self-generated principles, without appeal to external verities."[15] Although she is in touch with the uncertainties of her time – and of ours – she had her own reasons for being so. She does not respond to the 'crisis in civilization' expressly because of the experience of war, but because of the experience of manic-depression. Woolf challenges Russell's contention that knowledge is outside the self and beyond the senses: to do otherwise would have been to negate everything she herself 'knew' of

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[13] Karl Marx, quoted in Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin, 1988) 15.
[14] Evelyn Cobley, *Representing War* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993) 5.
[15] James McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 3.

the world. Woolf's sensitivity to paradigms of knowledge has its roots in two aspects of her own experience: her personal state of mind, and her gender.

As to her being "mad," as her nephew Quentin Bell terms her undeniable illnesses,[16] whatever the 'truth' about Virginia Woolf's state of mind, *Mrs. Dalloway* explores, as Woolf herself termed it, "the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side.[17] Woolf questions how it is we know what we know, and, as Russell says, "with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness," through narrative devices such as memory, point of view, gender, the sublime experience, the respective sanities and insanities of the characters – the sliding of the sane/insane minds. In *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, the two books which punctuate *Mrs. Dalloway* in Woolf's oûevre, "consciousness is the touchstone of 'knowable' reality, and consciousness has no absolute linear existence in time."[18]

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf uses the rhetorical device of pseudepigraphy in order to remove the lived experience from contemporary time and authorship. The events occur to fictional characters, in a fictional space, and are spread out amongst various characters rather than occurring to an individual. Mrs. Dalloway herself appears as the sane lynch-pin. The resulting

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[16] See Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), xvii. See also Stephen Trombley, *'All that Summer She was Mad': Virginia Woolf and her Doctors* (London: Junction Books, 1981), although the definitions of madness as applied to Woolf are unsatisfactorily vague and misleading. See also Thomas C. Caramagno, *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992). Caramagno makes a case for the known symptoms being those of manic-depression, or *bipolar affective disorder*. There was no medicine at the time which was capable of producing 'remissions' (Caramagno 1) or otherwise altering this mode of knowing which would have vitally affected her view of the world, of reality, of knowledge, of thinking, reasoning, sensing.

[17] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary Vol.II, Oct. 14, 1922)* 207.

[18] Thomas A Vogler, "Introduction," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of To The Lighthouse*, ed. Thomas A. Vogler (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 3.

narrative is mythical in that it offers "not merely a story told but a reality lived."[19] The composite experience of the novel is mythopoeic in being the lived reality. The key question, madness aside, pertains to the validity of the subjective world.

This brings us to the issue of gender and feminist thinking. The role of intuition is of some importance in any theory of knowledge, and most especially when discussing a feminist, pro-woman perspective, given the degree to which it has been privileged in discussions of 'feminine authority.' Such discussions have a tendency to regard Virginia Woolf as belonging to the camp of those who privilege 'feminine authority' when in fact her relationship to such a term is at best problematic.[20]

Mary Field Belenky argues, in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, that Woolf's way of knowing was subjective because of her gender. Belenky contends that 'subjective knowing' represents "a particularly significant shift for women when and if it occurs":

> Our reading of the women's stories leads us to conclude that as a woman becomes more aware of the existence of inner resources for knowing and valuing, as she begins to listen to the "still small voice" [1Kings 19:11-12] within her, she finds an inner source of strength. A major developmental transition follows that has repercussions in her relationships, self-concept and self-esteem, morality, and behaviour.

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[19] B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (N.Y.: Norton, 1927) 92.
[20] See Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987); Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Elizabeth Abel, ed. (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 243-259.

> Women's growing reliance on their intuitive processes is, we believe, an important adaptive move in the service of self-protection, self-assertion, and self-definition. Women become their own authorities.[21]

There is an important difference between the subjectivism of Belenky and that of Woolf that needs to be recognized in order to specifically understand Woolf. The "inner source of strength" to which Belenky points is essentially Platonic in that it represents "a still small voice," which materializes God's voice. The "intuitive process" in this sense remains linked with that which is essential, unchanging, what Plato called the invisible world of perfect ideas and, specifically, God. The authority is not women's own, but getting in touch with God within themselves. *Truth* in Belenky's sense is a reality beyond the world of the senses, although she privileges a subjective way of accessing it as opposed to Plato's objective path. Belenky's emphasis on the "intuitive process" not only relies on the gender stereotype of female intuition, but also belies her words that "women become their own authorities": the authority is the "still small voice" (54) of God.

Woolf was aware of living in a gendered universe. She knew that the exigencies of patriarchal life had molded her self-definition, her valuing, and her way of knowing. She was sensitive to the fact that her gender had disenfranchised her from attending Cambridge,[22] and *A Room of One's Own*[23] clearly delineates the difficulties faced by women writers and scholars. As Quentin Bell relates, 'masculine authority' was a very real factor in Virginia's

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[21] Mary Field Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic, 1986) 54.
[22] See Lyndall Gordon, *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (New York: Norton, 1984).
[23] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1928; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

life.[24] She broke through this narrowing experience, but not to a sense of herself as a 'woman writer'. Eschewing the politics of gender and feminism, Woolf separated *knowledge* from *gender*, positing instead, in *A Room of One's Own*, that every mind is potentially bisexual.[25]Woolf's theory of knowledge as expressed through the mythopoesis of her work points to subjective knowledge whose authority is truly experiential and not that of Belenky's female intuition, which is both gendered and a thinly-disguised appeal to outward religious authority.

For Woolf, *truth*, if there is such an essence, resides not in intuition, but in experience. It is neither God nor science. As Septimus muses, "Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness. But what was the scientific explanation (for one must be scientific above all things)? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future."[26] The fact is, the *reality* for Septimus is, "he could see through bodies," whatever the explanation. The experience of seeing through bodies (as well as birds speaking Greek and the many other extraordinary experiences of Septimus) is outside the realm of mysticism simply because it occurs not as intuition but as an experience of the senses.

In philosophical terms, knowledge is of reality: one knows what is real. If it is not real, one is mistaken in thinking one knows it. Therefore, what is real and what is not real (a shadow, perhaps?) is of prime importance. Who

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[24] See also Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (New York: Ballantine, 1989) 72.
[25] See Nancy Topping Bazin, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1973).
[26] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1986) 102.

makes this decision? How is it decided what is real and what is not? If you are Septimus Smith, the lines become blurred even in the realm of everyday experience:

> He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him.
>
> Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him – the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house.[27]

Through the character of Septimus, Woolf is taking umbrage with the prevalent attitude at the beginning of the twentieth century: the denigration of the sublime experience. The expansion of consciousness, the sublime experience that had been so prized during the nineteenth century, had fallen

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[27] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 103.

from grace. It was no longer seen as a window on *truth*, *truth* being the *reality* obscured from us in everyday life: the mystic experience had become invalidated by the medical paradigm in which the twentieth century psyche was immersed. The opium experience (that Septimus' experience echoes) had been replaced with the scientific, medical paradigm that holds that the mystic experience needs grounding in an everyday reality. Septimus is aware of this paradigm as he identifies and reasons out the 'real' source of his sublime moment – the "motor horn," the old man on the penny whistle, and the association with the roses on the bedroom wall. But what about the rest of this experience: the thrilling of the earth, the music meeting in "shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns"?[28]

Septimus' experience poses the question, 'Is this not equally as real, even though not a shared reality?' The sublime moment continues to occur, although tempered by the realization that it is *supposed* to be grounded in an everyday reality. Woolf's most far-reaching metaphysical argument is performed at this moment: Septimus' experience is not validated by any outside source, nor shared with any other consciousness;[29] it is an experience of the senses that has palpable reality. His experience epitomizes inward knowing that is neither intuition, nor religious, nor other-worldly. Although

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[28] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 103.

[29] Banfield refers to this as "a subjectless subjectivity" which Russell considered in his theory of knowledge, calling it a 'sensibile' or 'sensibilia': "I shall give the name *sensibilia* to those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data, without necessarily being data to any mind...(because) there happen to be no observers to whom they are data." Cited in Banfield 71. Russell is still arguing 'data' and "something which continues to exist when we go out of the room or shut our eyes" (71) – something tangible, which is not the same as Woolf's sense of the existence of a sensory experience, which remains in the realm of pure idea, intangible.

transcendent and sublime, it is an experience of the senses. Arguably Woolf's most original contribution to metaphysical theory, this concept of the sublimity of sense-experience goes far beyond any metaphysical concept Woolf and Russell may have held in common.

According to Russell, Septimus' knowledge, his reality, is "brought by the senses, and dependent ... upon ... a body whose sense-organs distort as much as they reveal,"[30] and is therefore unreliable. According to Russell, everyday experience is but the experience of the shadow. "In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on a closer scrutiny, are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may believe ... any statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences make us know is very likely to be wrong."[31]

Philosophically, such sophistry (if we may use this term loosely) makes perfect sense: it is logical, scientific. As Russell states, "what we see is constantly changing in shape as we move about the room; so that ... the senses seem not to give us the truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table."[32] However, if you are Septimus, or Clarissa, or Virginia, to know that you know nothing is an unbearable irony – nay, cruelty. When the most ordinary touchstones of reality are beyond your grasp and control, one can only imagine the attendant sense of powerlessness. If expanded consciousness offers a false window on knowledge/reality, and everyday experience is unreliable, what remains? What do we know, and how

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[30] Russell, *Problems* 160.
[31] Russell, *Problems* 7.
[32] Russell, *Problems* 11.

do we know it? This is the crux of the problem Woolf is addressing in *Mrs. Dalloway.*

The vision Woolf offers is an ironic one: Friedrich Schlegel's 'parabasis, "a sudden revelation of the discontinuity between two rhetorical codes,"[33] is revealed in the discontinuities of the codes of male/female and insane/sane which comprise the silent exchange between Septimus and Clarissa, and between Clarissa and Peter. There is an eerie sense of "a sudden revelation" as the thoughts of one slide into the thoughts of the other. The effect is to destabilize meaning by enhancing uncertainty about the processes by which meanings are determined in texts. The ironic double vision suggests the limitation of gendered experience when a stable 'self' is lacking. By shifting positions and perspectives, Clarissa is presented as a composite being, complex, ultimately unknowable.

> "I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
>
> It is Clarissa, he said.
>
> For there she was. (296)

In a general sense, we can say that Woolf divides experience into two categories: the tangible and the intangible. Woolf's narrative suggests there are two types of knowledge: the tangible and the intangible. Russell wrote in didactic prose because the knowledge he privileged respected the rules of

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[33] Friedrich Schlegel, cited in Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 300.

logic and *logos* — Heraclitus' sense of a rational pattern.[34] Woolf was suggesting that some knowledge cannot be contained in the rigid boundaries of logic and rationality. Russell contended that:

> Those who maintain there is knowledge not expressible in words, and use words to tell us what this knowledge is .... include the mystics, Bergson, and Wittgenstein, also certain aspects of Hegel and Bradley .... can be dismissed as self-contradictory.[35]

Woolf did not use words in the sense that Russell is deprecating here. The narrative method is superior for making arguments concerning intangible knowledge because, instead of explaining and describing, it makes manifest the intangible experience, enabling a new, shared experience. So often one's private and intangible experiences remain vague, elusive, and unreal because it is too hard to express them, to communicate the experience and *real*-ize them in a shared milieu. The narrative provides an actualizing moment.

The issue of shared experience is an important one because 'rational' philosophers such as Russell use this concept as a guide to the reliability and accuracy of the sense-data upon which a "vast cosmic edifice of inference"[36] is based. Woolf saw memory, imagination, and images as experiences. Take the example of memory. Russell writes that "when I have a memory-picture of

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[34] Heraclitus "acknowledges two different types of rationality: (1) the knowledge of (many) things and (2) the wisdom that has insight into those various facts. " Ring 65.
[35] Bertrand Russell, "Language and Metaphysics," *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961) 341.
[36] Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948) 22.

some event ... it is 'true' in so far as it has the resemblance which an image has to its prototype."[37] However, for Russell, "there must be in the outer world connections between facts similar to the connections between the visual sensation and the beliefs that it causes ..... In this way connections between facts are relevant in judging the truth or falsehood of what might pass as judgments of perception."[38] Facts exist "in the outer world" and involve words with conventional elements: shared experience. A personal, unverifiable memory is therefore unreliable.

Woolf asks, does memory lack reality? In the movie *Silence of the Lambs*, the psychopathic killer, Dr.Hannibal Lechter, from the confines of his jail cell contends that, "Memory ... is what I have instead of a view."[39] His memory enabled him to experience vivid and detailed scenes in the here and now. In this sense, memory is not simply a recollection of events from the past, which may or may not be accurate, but an intangible and personal experience in the present, using remembered sense-data instead of tangible ones. Russell concurs on this point: "everything constituting a memory-belief is happening *now*, not in that past time to which the belief is said to refer .... Hence the occurrences which are *called* knowledge of the past are logically independent of the past; they are wholly analyzable into present contents,

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[37] Russell, *Human Knowledge* 442.
[38] Russell, *Human Knowledge* 443.
[39] *The Silence of the Lambs,* dir. Jonathan Demme, perf. Jodie Foster, Anthony Hopkins, Scott Glenn, Orion 1990.

which might, theoretically, be just what they are even if no past had existed."[40]

However, Russell terms images and memory-images, "merely imaginary," saying that they do not have "the sort of reality that belongs to outside bodies."[41] Certainly, the intangible does not connect facts, and yet it may have the attribute of immediacy which it shares with outside bodies.

Immediacy is perhaps the only attribute which the intangible shares with outside bodies. "And isn't imagination the way we try to understand *anything* we did not directly experience?" writes Andrew Kunka. [42] We speak of 'trying to understand'; we speak of 'living vicariously'; we speak of 'recreating' an experience. For Woolf, memory, imagination, and images are real in themselves. The intangible, the imaginative, are real, although they do not adhere to the rules of logic.

Woolf is building upon Pater's explanation of Plato's sense of "absolute and independent knowledge"[43]: "all was gone that belonged to an outward and concrete experience, thus securing exclusive validity to the sort of knowledge, if knowledge it is to be called, which corresponds to the Pure Being."[44] Pater's discussion of Plato, while maintaining a clear division between the world of the senses and that of ideas, nonetheless opens the door to the possibility of the validity of non-traditional, supra-sensual knowledge.

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[40] Bertrand Russell, "Memory," *The Analysis of Mind* (1921; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924) 159-160.
[41] Russell, "Memory" 185.
[42] Andrew J. Kunka, "'Adversary Proceedings': Recent Books on War and Modernism," *Modern Fiction Studies* 44.3 (Fall 1998) 815.
[43] Pater 27.
[44] Pater 32.

For Woolf, rational, fact-based *reality*-tests are insufficient. In *Mrs. Dalloway* she evokes the idea that a shared experience can occur without either of the parties to the experience being aware of it. For instance, both Septimus and Clarissa see Dr. Bradshaw as one in whose power one would not want to be:

> So he was in their power! Holmes and Bradshaw were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place! "Must" it could say![45]

At the idea that "Holmes would get him,"[46] Septimus chooses rather to die. Clarissa shares with him the sense that a 'dignity' is wanted and is worth preserving:

> And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect ...[47]

They both recognize the need for a 'secret place,' and this belief constitutes a form of shared experience.

The tendency of people to think of Elizabeth in natural terms is a type of shared experience. Willie Titcomb, at the party, thinks, "She was like a poplar, she was like a river, she was like a hyacinth," echoing Elizabeth's thoughts when she is waiting to get on a bus: "People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it made her life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country, but they would compare

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[45] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway 223.*
[46] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 26.
[47] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 181.

her to lilies, and she had to go to parties."[48] In this case, Elizabeth has been made aware of the terms in which people see her, although she does not agree and finds the requirements of this 'mythic stage' in her life burdensome.

In his madness, Septimus does no more than Nietzsche or Heraclitus in writing his insights down as pithy aphorisms:

> Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down).[49]

His words enter the realm of shared experience. In fact, he experiences various 'accepted' kinds of experiences, including intuition and sublime moments. His most 'mad' moments are not the experiences in his mind, but when facts are interfered with: "None of these things moved. All were still; all were real."[50]

At the same time, Woolf evokes experiences which appear on the surface to be shared, and shows that they are replete with individual perspectives. The appearance of the "motor car with its blinds drawn"[51] is one such instance. No one knows who is in the car. Each person has a different idea on the matter: "ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a

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[48] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 204.
[49] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 35.
[50] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 215.
[51] Woolf. *Mrs. Dalloway* 23.

few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute."[52] The facts themselves are insufficient for drawing an accurate conclusion as to whom exactly is travelling in the car. Nonetheless, an intangible shared experience occurs: the feeling of veneration connects the people, and it does not matter who is actually in the car. The incident has evoked a symbol, the symbol of "greatness," whoever that person may be in actuality. Later in the narrative, at the party, the Prime Minister is depicted as being a very ordinary person, yet this does not detract from what he stands for as a symbol:

> One couldn't laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits — poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society.[53]

A symbol can encompass many ideas — it is the whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. Yet, as knowledge, it is intangible and can be described neither in words nor through the connectedness of facts.

The intangible can occur without sign or reference appearing in the outer world of facts. Clarissa illustrates this as she walks through the streets of

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[52] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 23.
[53] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 261-262.

London, thinking: "Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on."[54] There is no reflection in the outer world of the thoughts which are in her mind; however, they are no less real for being uttered privately. Being words, they still partake of convention, and therefore a shared reality.

The same is true for Peter Walsh. Woolf creates a sharp juxtaposition between his inner life and his outer one:

> ... doing what one likes, not caring a rap what people say and coming and going without any very great expectations (he left his paper on the table and moved off), which however (and he looked for his hat and coat) was not altogether true of him.[55]

The validity of the *content* of Peter's private speech is an entirely different issue from that of the *reality* of his private speech. Woolf raises this point in respect to what Peter and Clarissa believe each other to be thinking. During their shared experience in the drawing-room, there is the speech which takes place in the outer world, and then there is the private experience each one has, offering private perspectives (and inaccurate interpretations) of the experience.

> "Well, and what's happened to you?" she said.
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> .... He assembled from different quarters all sorts of things; praise; his career at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew

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[54] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 11.
[55] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 247.

> nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done his job.
>
> "Millions of things!" he exclaimed.[56]

Peter actually speaks a kind of shorthand of what he was thinking; in this case his thoughts are more full and accurate and, at least for detail, have a greater degree of *reality* than his spoken word. That he is mistaken in thinking Clarissa knows nothing of his marriage does not change the *reality* of his perspective: his perspective exists *simultaneously* with Clarissa's, and is no more or less real, even when it involves verifiable facts (his marriage and her knowledge of his marriage).

For Woolf, sensory knowing occurs in two dimensions. The tangible includes events, actions, and speech. The intangible includes ideas, thoughts, memories, and reverberations. The tangible is also effable; the intangible may or may not be. To illustrate the limits of rigid paradigms of knowledge, Woolf slides between the two dimensions. Moving from the figurative to the literal is the most direct example:

> For having lived in Westminster — how many years now? over twenty, — one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes.[57]

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[56] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 66.
[57] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4-5.

We notice it especially because it goes against our expectations, interrupting the reliability of her personal experience ("one feels") with the medical paradigm. Finally, the personal is privileged: "The leaden circles dissolved in the air."[58]

A more complex example occurs as Clarissa is both remembering and considering Peter Walsh. One moment he is a memory, a consideration, and the next he has almost materialized:

> ... that was only her dear Peter at his worst; and he could be intolerable; he could be impossible, but adorable to walk with on a morning like this.[59]

A literal and figurative metonymy has occurred. Clarissa is indeed 'walking with him' as she 'real-izes' him through the immediacy of her imaginative experience.

When the tangible and the intangible intertwine, Woolf's point is driven home:

> "Do you remember the lake?" she said, in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said "lake." For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew

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[58] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 5.
[59] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 8.

> larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, "This is what I have made of it! This!"And what had she made of it? What, indeed? sitting there sewing this morning with Peter.[60]

Through emotional contact with a memory-image, Clarissa experiences a sublime moment in which all that she was becomes all that she is, at this moment in time, "sitting this morning with Peter."[61]

As Woolf writes later in the narrative,

> It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people .... So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter — even trees, or barns.[62]

Ultimately, Woolf argues, perhaps it is simply that we do not have the tools for measuring the interrelationship of dimensions of reality:

> Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional.[63]

Woolf has employed the literary conventions of resistance throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, through the narrative choice of

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[60] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 63-64.
[61] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 64.
[62] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 231.
[63] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 25.

pseudepigraphy and metaphoric language, including visions, which suggests that she was aware of going against the received thinking of her time. From what we know of Woolf and her time, both her state of mind and her gender placed her in a potentially dissident position. Investigation of the nature of reality is a quintessentially Greek theme, and Woolf has added her voice in an undeniably Greek way: through mythopoesis, where experience is not analyzed, but rather grasped "in a unitary act of perception"[64] during the course of one's experience of the narrative.

The discussion which follows looks at literary Gothicism in Woolf's stories, "A Haunted House," "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," and "The Legacy." Woolf's metaphysical concepts are actualized in these stories which self-consciously evoke the question of the real versus the not-real.

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[64] G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible (London: Duckworth. 1980) 196.*

ii) Virginia Woolf's "A Haunted House,"

"The Lady in the Looking-Glass," and "The Legacy":

Gothic Conventions, Abjection, and Melancholy

The relationship between Gothicism and modernism has been described as:

> A sentiment of duplicity which both captures the spirit of the Count's vampiric yet dandified demeanor, and the ambitions of a certain kind of writing which entertains the absurd in order to raise questions about reality. It is this process, or quest, which brings together the Gothic and modernist text in their mutual search for a world of meaning which needs to be both recorded and affirmed, although via an employment of symbolism which privileges culture as the space where such debates take place.[1]

Perhaps it was natural that Woolf should link with literary Gothicism, given her exploration of reality, her sense of personal exile, and her need for a vehicle for the expression of complex ideas and experiences. Literary Gothicism boasted a long generic history by the time Woolf came to harness it for her purposes. Woolf does not so much write in the Gothic tradition as make use of its conventions to evoke questions of the real versus the not-real, life versus not-life, unity of personality versus division. As she herself pointed out, "warning the aspiring ghost writer [that] 'your ghosts will only make us laugh' if they simply aim at the obvious sources of fear. For after world war, tabloid journalism and mass mechanical production 'we breakfast upon a richer feast of horror than served our ancestors for a twelve-month ... we are

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[1] Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace, "Introduction: Gothic Modernisms: History, Culture and Aesthetic," *Gothic Modernisms* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 2.

impervious to fear.'"[2] In her short stories "A Haunted House," "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," and "The Legacy," Woolf uses Gothic conventions to materialize the dimensionality of life.

At the same time, she has no use for many aspects of literary Gothicism. I was going to say the stock characters and story-lines, but these are certainly part of what she evokes – and then turns to her own purpose. Rather, her technique is to sketch the merest reference evocative of the rich Gothic tradition – a reader can do the work of fleshing it out. In this sense, Woolf's Gothicism is impressionist at best. Her language is characterized by a sense of innate contradiction: its confines are fluid; it sublimates the inexpressible; it objectifies the subjective.

Literary Gothicism at its most superficial is characterized by certain machinery such as a haunting of some kind (especially of a castle), a damsel in distress, the presence of the supernatural, preoccupation with the unnatural, as well as with the unspeakable, guilt and shame, madness, and the link between life and death. The form in which this machinery is presented has altered over the years, from what Hendershot calls a "rigid periodization"[3] of the late eighteenth century to the more subtle evocations characteristic of twentieth century Gothic. Some of the more standard critical interpretations of Gothic literature[4] point out the extent to which it perpetuates Judaeo-Greco

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[2] Judith Wilt, "The Ghost and the Omnibus: the Gothic Virginia Woolf," *Gothic Modernisms* 62, cites Virginia Woolf's essay, "Henry James's Ghost Stories" (1921).
[3] Cindy Hendershot, *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1998) 1.
[4] Some of the more important critical works include Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination* (London: Assoc. Univ. Press, 1982), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (London: Methuen, 1986), among others.

concerns of the rational versus the irrational, the expansion of personal consciousness, resistance, and anti-establishment championing of the individual. As well, literary Gothicism enables a site for catharsis (specifically of fear, melancholy, and sublimity).

As Robert Heilman has outlined, the genre inherently pushes the envelope of reality:

> In the novel it was the function of Gothic to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions; in a word, to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being. It became then a great liberator of feeling. It acknowledged the non-rational – in the world of things and events, occasionally in the realm of the transcendental, ultimately and most persistently in the depths of the human being.[5]

Literary Gothicism is, foremost, textual resistance to status quo. As Linda Bayer-Berenbaum points out, "beneath the Gothic gimmicks, the essential tenet is an expansion of consciousness and reality that is basic to every aspect of the Gothic, from setting to metaphysical claims."[6] The ability to think is projected "beyond the human mind and then given the capacity to alter the physical world."[7] This extended reality has an integral connection to the world around us; conversely, it represents a "revolt against … the tyranny

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[5] Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Bronte's 'New" Gothic," *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse,* ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958) 123.
[6] Bayer-Berenbaum 21.
[7] Bayer-Berenbaum 32.

of the physical world."[8] Thus, the fascination with death is a conquering of life. The supernatural represents "the ultimate expansion of consciousness."[9]

Literary Gothicism might have attracted Woolf because of the degree to which it is inherently anti-establishment: it "champions individuals rather than institutions ... the revolutionary sympathies in Gothicism do not really spring from any concern for the masses or for societal injustice, but from the expansion of personal experience."[10] It does not tolerate restriction of the individual. Woolf's life showed a tension between 'received' behavioural norms and the avant-garde. Through the disintegration of order, the Gothic invades "the realms of the socially forbidden."[11]

One of those realms, of course, is madness. "Gothicism suggests some psychological if not external veracity for superstition, some sanity in the insane. Madness is often portrayed as a highly developed sensitivity to a reality that normal people are too dull to perceive."[12] Woolf's sense of expanded reality would have made this aspect of Gothicism attractive to her. Gothicism "ridicules the separation between conventional reality and religious experience,"[13] enlarging the scope of possibility for experience of sublimity.

Woolf, however, had no need of the genre of literary Gothicism to free her mind of social constraints – this was her natural state and privilege. She had need of the stability of the genre to aid in shaping her thoughts, and in

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[8] Bayer-Berenbaum 29.
[9] Bayer-Berenbaum 32.
[10] Bayer-Berenbaum 43.
[11] Bayer-Berenbaum 43.
[12] Bayer-Berenbaum 38.
[13] Bayer-Berenbaum 34.

voicing her experience. In this sense, she is not a Gothic mind: she does not require the loosening of constraints, but rather the constraining of the loosed.

Woolf's writing and the perspective of much standard critical interpretation differ in some important respects. To begin with, there is the issue of what constitutes reality. In Bayer-Berenbaum's world of the Gothic, there is the ever-present interrogation of received reality – received reality is the base from which Gothicism advances, from which "expansion and intensification of consciousness"[14] takes place. From Woolf's perspective, however, consciousness has its experience in the sublime, in the expansive realm: from this perspective received reality becomes a fiction.

Attendant to the issue of what constitutes reality is that of the interpretation of the spatial dimensions of literary Gothicism. Sedgwick points out that "self is spatialized" in literary Gothicism: "typically ... there is both something going on inside the isolation ... and something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach.... creating a doubleness where singleness should be".[15] Rigney also addresses the issue of the doppelganger: "The basis of their connection would seem to be the experiences of both, differing only in degree of intensity, in the subjective realms of anxiety, isolation, ontological insecurity, and, finally, psychosis and mysticism".[16] Often, we view this inside/outside spatialized self through the Freudian lens of repression.

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[14] Bayer-Berenbaum 15.
[15] Sedgwick 12-13.
[16] Barbara Hill Rigney, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978) 41.

Repression necessarily involves some sense of shame and guilt, some inability to deal with some occurrence in some dimension of 'reality'.

Here, Woolf parts company with Freud, for her work is so entirely lacking fear and 'spiking' passions. There are no monsters here, only relentless strangeness and hypersensitivity. Many of the concerns of works traditionally viewed as Gothic (think of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, or even "The Fall of the House of Usher") are entirely lacking: disruptions of social order, violence, monstrosity. The Gothic machinery in Woolf is subtle and invites argument as to whether the work can appropriately be labelled Gothic.[17]

The concept of abjection offers another perspective on the spatial dimensions of literary Gothicism. Kristeva has discussed at length the idea that literature in general (and literature of horror in particular) is created in order to signify the abject.[18] Here, then, is a psychological theory that directly answers the challenge of the *meaning* of literary creation, and which responds to many curious devices in literature: symbolism, doubling, and ambiguity, to name but a few. Literature, for Kristeva, is a *signifier* of abjection: it heralds the 'reality' of abjection.[19] She claims that the foundation of imagination is

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[17] Failure to do so, however, is to overlook the framing capabilities of the genre. All of the concerns of the conventional Gothic materialize instantly with one stroke of the Gothic option.

[18] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trs. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 208. Kristeva's psychology encompasses a much broader and bolder view of literature, and of abjection, than that to which this short study of Woolf can pretend. Nonetheless, Kristeva's thinking is well known today and must be taken into consideration when discussing the abject.

[19] It is important at this point in our argument to distinguish between the psychological theory of Kristeva, as a discussion of the mechanism of the mind, and its possible implications for literary criticism. The psychological theory posits that abjection is caused by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Unable to identify with something on the outside, the subject "finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that

laid in the experience of *want* "as logically preliminary to being and object – to the being of object."[20] "Being, meaning. language, [and] or desire" are founded on *want*;[21] therefore, *want* is signified through abjection: "One understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified. Its signifier, then, is none but literature."[22]

She defines the abject as a 'jettisoned object'[23]:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.... Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.[24]

Kristeva makes six specific connections that speak to our understanding of Woolf's Gothicism. First, she considers literary abjection "a sublimating discourse."[25] In Freudian understanding of the unconscious, the contents are repressed, and are associated with shame and guilt. For Kristeva,

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it *is* none other than abject" (5). Irresistibly, one connects this with Woolf and her madness, her realization that her way of knowing was, well, abjected, at least within her cultural milieu. Nonetheless, Woolf's psychology is not at issue here: only the functioning of her literature.

[20] Kristeva 5.

[21] Kristeva 5.

[22] Kristeva 5. Once said, this seems almost a given. Yet consider: if *want* must undergo abjection to objectify, then anything which has become objectified – be it language or thing – is an abject of one description or another. Kristeva is here focusing upon horror, nightmare, crisis and so on, and extrapolating from this a theory of modern literature. Logically, it both is and is not so. It is so to the extent that all literature, according to this theory, signifies abjection. It is not so in that such abjection is not necessarily of ambiguity, crisis, or the untenable.

[23] Kristeva 2.

[24] Kristeva 1.

[25] Kristeva 7.

experience not admitted by standard discourse would 'normally' be unconscious and would become openly manifested through symbolic practices. (This need not be experience involving shame and guilt, but simply those which are difficult to articulate, such as the aesthetic or the mystical.) Thus, literature is a sublimating discourse offering symbolic possibilities.

Secondly, she identifies "the one by whom the abject exists" as an *exile*: "A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh."[26] This is a particularly interesting point in view of the 19th century 'exiled' state of mind that we discussed previously as being part of the impetus for returning to the classical world as a symbolic homeland. Gothicism functions in part as a symbolic homeland, a *topos*, for the exiled.

Kristeva also identifies a clear connection between literary Gothicism and sublimity. As we discussed previously, for Woolf the sublime is a dimension of knowledge, real, if not tangible. The supernatural requirements of the Gothic genre facilitate the evocation of the sublime as real. In Gothic there is a very real sense of blurring the distinctions between conventional reality and sublime experience in such a way as to undermine a sound, predictable reality. Kristeva points to a ridiculing of the "separation between conventional reality and religious experience so crucial to Christianity, such as the distinction between the heavenly and the mortal or between the uplifted

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[26] Kristeva 8.

and the mundane."[27] Woolf takes this one step further by dropping the connection with religious impulse while maintaining the blurring of distinctions of the dimensions of reality.

Yet, the Gothic conventions maintain a clear connection with the world, what we normally think of as reality. As Kristeva notes, "The peculiarly Gothic quality of this extended reality is its immanence, its integral, inescapable connection to the world around us."[28] The Gothic conventions root the experience in conventional reality, and give it substance and an objective possibility.

The long generic history of the literary Gothic creates this possibility for Woolf. As Varnado points out, "The ghost story stands or falls on its power to convince the reader that the feeling of the supernatural corresponds to some element in reality."[29] In a type of Pavlovian reaction, the reader's willingness to make some such connection remains when the appropriate elements are sketched out, though the work may not fully meet the expectations for the genre.

Kristeva, moreover, connects the Gothic with the sublime through abjection:

> For the sublime has no object either. When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of

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[27] Kristeva 34-35.
[28] Kristeva 21.
[29] S.L. Varnado, *Haunted Presence: The Numinous in Gothic Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1987) 5.

> caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think. The "sublime" object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which, from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of the dazzlement in which I stray in order to be. As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers – it has always already triggered – a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am – delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling.[30]

Notice the role of memory in Kristeva's depiction of the sublime experience. It is the springboard to a "secondary universe," intangible but nonetheless real.

Kristeva connects the Gothic with two distinct Greek philosophies. The first is Aristotelian catharsis: she contends that Gothicism, of all literature, involves poetic catharsis, which is a kind of abjection since the emotion or experience is placed outside oneself. Secondly, she connects with the ethos of the Greek polis through Hegel's contention that there is no other

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[30] Kristeva 12.

ethic than that of the act. In other words, by choosing to act (by writing), the author is partaking of a peculiarly Greek ethic. This is most important in terms of Woolf, H.D., and Lawrence in that all three had a vested interest in the concrete nature of ideas as capable of forming, or changing, the world. We will see more of this when we discuss H.D. and Lawrence. This is certainly true of Woolf, who clearly needed the stabilizing influence of poetic creation.

Finally, Kristeva points to a particular phenomenon of literary Gothicism: that "straying on excluded ground" draws on the exiled one's jouissance.[31] Kristeva contends that the moment of engagement in jouissance is sublime:

> Then, forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.[32]

Jouissance explains, perhaps, the total lack of fear attendant upon Woolf's use of the Gothic. Her concern is not the Gothic, per se, but the Gothic's ability to harness the powers of abjection and jouissance.

The last concept we need to consider is that of melancholia. In his "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud contended that "it is evident that melancholia ... may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object; where this is

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[31] Kristeva 8.
[32] Kristeva 8-9.

not the exciting cause one can perceive that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has become lost as an object of love;" [33] "the loss of some abstraction ... such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on."[34] To look at Woolf's work in terms of its melancholic impulse is to trace the evidence of loss (and to pose the question of what object of love was lost, whether a person or an abstraction). Melancholy is closely associated with abjection because it is the abjection of a *want*, in this case of a loss.

"The Lady in the Looking-Glass" begins with such a loss as the lady in question, Isabella Tyson, the mistress of the house, is no longer in the house ("gone presumably into the lower garden to pick flowers"). [35] Her absence becomes the central focus of the story. The melancholia can be traced through the ways in which the narrator deals with the loss until the realization of the ultimate absence, that "Isabelle was perfectly empty."[36]

The clearest signal of Gothicism comes at the end, when "the truth" is displayed in the looking-glass. This sort of delayed device causes one to question whether or not the story can be said to be Gothic. In this case, the pairing of the abject and the melancholy throughout the story underlies its Gothic claim.

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[33] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *General Psychological Theory*, Ed. Philip Rieff (N.Y.: Cromwell-Collier, 1963) 166.
[34] Freud 164.
[35] Virginia Woolf, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," *A Haunted House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 94.
[36] Woolf, "Lady" 99.

The title, of course, foreshadows the interpretation of the image in the mirror. Literature has a long tradition of revelation through mirrors. We think of Narcissus, Snow White, Alice 'through the looking-glass', and even of Dorian Gray, where the painting reveals what the human face does not. The Gothicism in this story, though, lies in what the glass fails to reveal. The glass shows nothing, as it would if faced with a vampire, a soul-less creature. Coming to terms with this lack is the essential melancholia of the story.

Gothic also is the haunting, the expanded consciousness with which the story begins. The room is full of "the shyest animals,"[37] essentially unreal, no more than "obscure flushes and darkenings,"[38] the product, we do not know whether to presume, of an overactive imagination. In the Gothic, this sublime perspective is given more weight and veracity than the so-called normal world. And so it is in this story. The 'normal' world is reflected in the looking-glass "so accurately and so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality unescapably."[39] Woolf does not deny the reality of the 'normal' world: Isabella Tyson is revealed through her participation in this world ("She came so gradually that she did not seem to derange the pattern in the glass"[40]). She belongs to the looking-glass world, the world of fixed reality, the world outside the subtle, shaded, thinking one which the narrator inhabits. "And

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[37] Woolf, "Lady" 93.
[38] Woolf, "Lady" 94.
[39] Woolf, "Lady" 94.
[40] Woolf, "Lady" 99.

there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills."[41]

The deep, soulful, private life is abjected throughout the story. The possibly overactive imagination is, in fact, standard. It is taken to be the natural state of affairs, the expected reality. That "the room had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being"[42] seems at first a natural reflection of the woman who normally inhabited it. In fact, it is a reflection of the narrator, the abjection of the narrator. The narrator is puzzled by "how very little, after all these years, one knew about her"[43] and looks for evidence of Isabelle's deep private life: "if one had the audacity to open a drawer and read her letters, one would find the traces of many agitations, of appointments to meet, of upbraidings for not having met, long letters of intimacy and affection, violent letters of jealousy and reproach ... judging from the mask-like indifference of her face, she had gone through twenty times more of passion and experience than those whose loves are trumpeted forth for all the world to hear."[44] With these expectations raised, the 'truth' which the looking-glass reveals provides for the narrator's loss and melancholy.

"A Haunted House" is more evidently Gothic, judging by the presence of Gothic machinery. There is an immediate and deliberate attempt on Woolf's part to evoke the Gothic echoes with the title and with the night

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[41] Woolf, "Lady" 99.
[42] Woolf, "Lady" 94.
[43] Woolf, "Lady" 94.
[44] Woolf, "Lady" 95.

setting which is established in the first paragraph, as well as the introduction of "a ghostly couple."[45] The piece is short and intensely poetic; it manages to carry the weight of its Gothic enterprise to the end when "the heart of the house beats,"[46] in the best tradition of Poe. Like Poe, the house and all that happens within it operates as a metaphor for human experience, perception, and psychological being.

By establishing the Gothic framework immediately, Woolf places the piece in position for a strong ironic rendering through the figurative use of language. Consider, for instance, the ambiguous language with which the piece begins. "Whatever hour you woke there was a door shutting."[47] When taken in conjunction with the title, "A Haunted House," this phrase leads one to presume it is night, when mortals sleep. When waking during the night one would be confronted with the evidence of a ghostly haunting through the sound of a door shutting.

However, an alternate and equally Gothic reading would hold the house to be representative, metaphorically, of a mind. In this context, to wake is to become aware – in this case, aware of "a door shutting," or an avenue of knowledge being closed off. One becomes aware, then, of an end rather than of a beginning, a loss of some kind the abjection of which would be melancholia. Thus, the "ghostly couple" appears totally abjected, having nothing to do with the 'self' of the narrator: "a door" shuts (not <u>the</u> door), and

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[45] Virginia Woolf, "A Haunted House," *A Haunted House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 9.
[46] Woolf, "Haunted" 11.
[47] Woolf, "Haunted" 9.

"they" went. Notice that they are very close, "hand in hand," lovers or children one presumes. The key words here are "making sure." These words are neither positive nor negative, but raise the question of what they are making sure. Even the expression "a ghostly couple" is ambiguous. Are they ghosts or just ghostly?

That they have left something here and there is neither positive nor negative. There is some presumption of meaning in the subject "it." They appear to be checking that they are still in touch with the places where 'it' was left. The use of the past tense ("Here we left it") slides into the simple present ("It's upstairs"), indicating that 'it' remains where they left it, and their actions verify this expectation, "making sure."

Notice that the narrator is not concerned about the presence and activity of this "ghostly couple." The couple, on the other hand, shows both awareness of and concern for "them." The question arises as to why they should be concerned about waking people. Something is presumed here, presumed about their attitude, to which the only clue is the convention of the Gothic, which maintains a wall between us and them. Here, though, there is no fear and the wall is very thin.

The answer lies in the economy of awareness in the story. If knowledge is power, then the power resides with "us." "Us" is already aware, already clued in ("wasn't that you woke us"), whereas the "ghostly couple" is not aware of the connection.

Reading with a pencil in hand further depicts awareness through making notes. When the narrator rises to "see for oneself," the lines blur between us/them. There is a deliberate echo between "the house all empty" and "My hands were empty," and we must question the correspondence between these "empty" positions. The house is *not* empty – the narrator is there. The hands are empty of the book, but the narrator is not empty-handed in that he/she is on a mission ("to see for oneself"). This is further linked with the reading and pencilling: "found it in the drawing-room."

Notice also that whereas "us" is potentially plural ("it wasn't that you woke us"), the narrator moves to "I". Who is saying this? Them? Or has the narrator had a lapse while "seeing for oneself"? Is she describing a Gothic, sublime moment, that interruption of normal activity which is a slipping into the ghostly, secondary universe, becoming aware (looking for) something else?

We have only read three paragraphs, but it is clear that some complex ideas are being barely contained and expressed within the controlling structure of a conventional ghost story.

Woolf says as much in the fourth paragraph. The Gothic becomes indicative of presence, of the reality of the non-corporeal: "Not that one could ever see them." Precisely because there is a convention of ghostly encounters, the evanescence and ambiguity is understandable – the reader is brought on side and agrees, one would not ever see them. The indication of presence is so

slight: "the apple only turned its yellow side." Yet, there is some cross-over to the physical world, even if only the colour change.

With the opening of the door – figuratively, awareness – the room explodes with something inexplicable, something which slides away, is intangible. "My hands were empty." This contrasts with the opening of the story when 'they' shut doors. There is confusion, ambiguity, and a lost train of thought. "My hands were empty" is synonymous with 'nothing to hold on to.'

The language turns figurative and poetic: "The shadow of a thrush crosses the carpet." Shadows, like winds, are evanescent appearances from the secondary, sublime universe – some symbolic traditions would say God. Birds are figuratively representations of souls in many traditions, and thus this phrase could indicate the hesitant, barely realized abjection of the deepest sense of self – a realization of soul. When "from the deepest wells of silence the wood pigeon drew its bubble of sound," we image a lowly bird, emitting no more than a squawk, which, with the word 'drew,' is linked to the drawing-room, to the notes on the paper, and to the narrator. The "bubble of sound" is fragile. It is the writer's expression, sound, communication. With the word "safe" we realize that one is safe with expression, not lost without voice.

At the climactic moment "the pulse of the house beat softly," as though it were the lifeblood coursing through a living body, in the state of being "safe."At the moment of revelation the pulse – the words – stop. The realization is uttered hesitantly, in the form of a question, "Oh was that the

buried treasure?"[48] The language is in the past tense, showing that, as the moment fades from the present into the past, the revelation is already passing: "A moment later the light had faded." Yet, it is a recurring experience: "So fine, so rare, coolly sunk beneath the surface the beam I sought always burnt behind the glass."[49] The narrator connects with the ghostly seekers. The Gothic death ("Death was the glass") recurs in the cycle of the sublime experience.

"The Legacy" shows a similar use of the Gothic, although, like "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," the genre is invoked in subtle ways. The title, of course, draws on a standard of Gothic story lines: someone has died and some inheritance is involved. At the same time, a legacy is the lasting result of a particular action. The opening of the story continues the blend of meanings: someone has died and bequeathed possessions. However, the question is raised as to which precise action has the consequences. Is it the more usual one of death and inheritance, or is it the action that preceded the death, which was stepping off the kerb? The mystery lies in how prepared Angela was for her death.

The emotional tableau is established in several ways. First, she leaves particular 'things' to friends. This shows planning on her part, as well as the depth of her attachments to others. Secondly, she leaves "nothing in particular" [50] to her husband. This suggests that she did not feel the same towards him as she felt towards her friends. The words "of course" suggest

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[48] Woolf, "Haunted" 10.
[49] Woolf, "Haunted" 11.
[50] Virginia Woolf, "The Legacy," *A Haunted House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 132.

that he was aware of the difference between himself and her friends in her regard. Finally, there is the fact that he remembers and associates with each item she has left for her friends. This suggests that the scope of her possessions is limited, and that everything she had materially came from him. The diary is her 'legacy' to him and he considers this "the only thing they had not shared when she was alive."[51]

The concept of a legacy is familiar to the Gothic tradition, as it is to the Romance genre. This story effectively straddles the two. Miss Miller is part of the Gothic machinery, shrouded in black and a receptacle for secrets: "There were thousands of Sissy Millers – drab little women in black carrying attache cases .... the soul of discretion; so silent; so trustworthy, one could tell her anything."[52] She is a type. The affair with her brother is part of the Romance machinery. Angela's secret does not make this story primarily Gothic: it is the fact that her secret was her emotional estrangement from her husband – it is the revelation of the depth and separateness of her emotional life.

In Woolf's hands, the Gothic has become a channel for a feminist perspective. Unlike other classics of the Gothic genre such as Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in which the female operates symbolically and is victimized, "The Legacy" enables a feminist voice, positioning the female protagonist vis-à-vis the man.

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[51] Woolf, "Legacy" 133.
[52] Woolf, "Legacy" 133.

Mr. Clandon presumes knowledge he does not have. He has ironically misinterpreted every clue given him. The "little black coat and skirt that seemed the uniform of her profession"[53] is, in fact, Sissy's mourning garb. He presumes Angela was upset at the death of Sissy's brother because she had a "genius for sympathy."[54] He presumes Sissy's concern for him is because she "entertained a passion for him."[55]

His judgment of things and people outside of himself is rendered entirely suspect through the economy of power which privileges the insight of the words: the legacy of the diary, as well as the legacy of this piece of writing. The diary materializes a co-existent reality – in Gothic fashion, of ghosts, since both perpetrators have died. In the secondary reality, the seeming enigma is clear and exposed. Clandon meets the unexpected ("Her words and the look that went with them were unexpected"[56]) and is moved from his secure fantasy of what he thought was true – including his sense of self. His world is turned upside down, a technique which is traditional of both Gothic and Romance.

Once again, the question is raised as to what one can reliably 'know,' with the response being that all he really knows is what he himself experiences and remembers experiencing. The role of memory is carefully drawn in this story. As Clandon looks at the items Angela has chosen to give her friends, he recalls something about each: "This he had given her; this – the

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[53] Woolf, "Legacy" 134.
[54] Woolf, "Legacy" 134.
[55] Woolf, "Legacy" 135.
[56] Woolf, "Legacy" 135.

enamel dolphin with the ruby eyes – she had pounced upon one day in a back street in Venice. He could remember her little cry of delight."[57] However, as he begins to read the diary, he realizes that his memories begin to diverge from her experience: "He tried to recall that evening. Was she waiting up for him when he came back? .... He could remember nothing – nothing whatever, nothing except his own speech at the Mansion House dinner."[58] A memory-image can be the intersection point of the tangible and the intangible, as we saw previously. Woolf uses it here to express the lack of intimacy in this marriage, the presumptions of the husband, and the suspect nature of his knowledge.

As a tool in the hands of Woolf, literary Gothicism becomes a channel for metaphysical expression. It enables an accessible link between the tangible and the intangible. Its conventions readily respond to issues of psychological depth: the questioning of reality, the expression of individuality, as well as positing the known versus the unknown. Woolf employs the conventions of Gothicism with a subtlety that underscores their rhetorical potency. No longer a broad clash between pseudo-religious forces of good and evil, Woolf's Gothicism resists even the stereotypical sense of the Gothic as "shattering of consciousness"[59] since it reaffirms a positioning of self and re-places narrative authority which appears, in the initial sense of Gothic, to have been lost.

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[57] Woolf, "Legacy" 132.
[58] Woolf, "Legacy" 139.
[59] Wilt 62.

## Conclusion

Woolf's metaphysical positioning is ultimately classical: one knows what is real. One cannot know what is not real. The true discussion comes in the details of what one knows, and here Woolf pushes the envelope of knowledge, extending it into the realm of the sublime, into the realm of the so-called non-rational, subjective experience, and into the realm of the relativity of experience depending upon subject positioning. Narrative is the rhetorical strategy of choice for Woolf, and within this broad structure she specifically employs ironic metaphor, which supports multiple subject positions, and mythopoesis, which enables a continuing, lived experience.

## II. Coded Language

### i) H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*: Transformation and Displacement in Mythopoesis – Moravian and Gnostic Belief -Systems

Preface

This section continues our investigation of mythopoesis through metaphor, and adds the dimension of coded language. If Woolf was confronting the definition of what is real, H.D. has no such uncertainties. I argue here that, by 1960, she was convinced of the certainty of her understanding, and was at pains to create a document that would pass both the knowledge and the mythic stories of her religion on to posterity. She followed in the footsteps of the ancient Gnostic writers, for whom embedding the essence of the religious beliefs in ironic metaphor and coded language was the norm. H.D. made a rhetorical choice to communicate in this fashion.

H.D. is included in this study not only because of her choice of ironic metaphor and coded language, but also because *Helen in Egypt* is, on one level at least, a reworking of an important classical story. She participates in the rhetorical strategies of classicism in more ways than one: the poem involves mythical language, not because it is based on a classical myth, but because it communicates a mystical, lived experience in its less obvious, ironic dimension.

Coded language is the rhetoric of choice in any situation when the material to be communicated must not be expressed openly. A form of closeted rhetoric, coded language was the choice of Gnostic writers:

> The interpretive method of allegory and symbolism, widely diffused in the ancient world, was freely employed. That is, a statement of the text was given a deeper meaning, or even several, in order to claim it for

> one's own doctrine or to display its inner richness. This method of exegesis is in Gnosis a chief means of producing one's ideas under the cloak of the older literature ....We may frankly speak of a "protest exegesis" in so far as it runs counter to the external text and the traditional interpretation."[1]

H.D. is therefore working in the tradition of Gnostic writing by embedding the Gnostic text beneath and within a pre-existing structure. Gnostics employed this technique for many complex reasons. The most important reason may have been that it is a religion of revelation: one must come to the knowledge, and it is given only to those elect who are capable of receiving it. The text therefore performs its ironic function as part of the difficulties of election. Then, too, it was a religion that developed at the same time, and counter to, Christianity. The Doctrine of Redemption and the Redeemer has been shown to have developed separately from that of the Christian doctrine of Christ the redeemer.[2] Yet, Christ figures largely in many later Gnostic texts, especially Coptic gnosticism. Partly, this is because non-Christians began to be attacked as heretics, and partly this is because the Christian doctrine blended so well with the Gnostic project. There remain essential differences that keep Gnosticism from ever being confused with Christianity, in spite of the similarity of textual matter.

As with the study of Woolf, this study of coded language focuses on one author, H.D., and has two sections to it. In the first section, I focus upon

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[1] Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trs. Ed. R. McLachlan Wilson (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 54.
[2] See Rudolph 148.

an initial argument that H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* could have a Gnostic project due to H.D.'s Moravian belief-system. The section second expands upon this premise to show the way in which certain Gnostic beliefs and myths are embedded in the ironic text. I have purposely chosen to speak only of *Helen in* Egypt since, although it can be argued that H.D. was struggling with her 'alternative' belief-system all her life, and that this is reflected in the classical imagery to be found throughout her oeuvre, it was only after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts[3] that she had the confirmation she required to proceed with her own Gnostic text.

The Rhetoric of Mythopoesis

H.D. found herself at odds with the society in which she lived. She explored metaphoric possibilities that would allow her to express her vision in keeping with her Moravian beliefs. In the true spirit of resistance, she chose coded language that would function ironically, revealed only to the initiated. This resulted in work that was dense, obtuse, and difficult for most readers, and thus she is not the best known of the modernists.

Much of her work uses pre-established classical myth as its metaphoric base. This mythological tradition serves several purposes in H.D.'s work. First, she is able to harness the language of myth and the reverberations therein. It seems to have enabled her to actualize symbolic activity. It uses the

[3] According to Rudolph, the discovery was made in Egypt around 1947; information concerning the discovery was gradually made available to researchers and the public as late as 1956, with the preparation of inventory, review, and classification continuing up until 1975. (34-44.) The Nag Hammadi texts give the most complete view yet of Gnostic belief; it is certainly viable to suggest that H.D. was able to put the pieces together, given even as much knowledge as was available to her in 1960, to write her Gnostic text.

same metaphoric language as the Moravian belief-system she expresses in her work, thus enabling both a perfectly ironic reading and true mythopoesis as she creates a new, vital myth.

The nineteenth century saw a resurgence of literature inspired by classical subjects, modelled on classical myths, and incorporating ancient mythic structures. There was also a changing sense of symbol and allegory, in the nineteenth century, and sign in the twentieth.[4] During the nineteenth century, mythopoesis was connected with a sense of sublimity, as though synonymous with that which went beyond Kant's ordering lens of time-space perceptions.[5] It was possible, even privileged, to be conscious outside of time-space limitations.[6] This sublime sense of the relationship between "the image that rises up before the senses and the super sensory totality that the image suggests" is, de Man contends, a mode of "the classical idea of a unity between incarnate and ideal beauty."[7]

de Man goes on to suggest two developments in the twentieth century: first, that metaphorical styles have developed "that cannot be called

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[4] de Man reminds us that the word 'symbol' began to supplant 'allegory' in discussions of figural language at the end of the eighteenth century. "Appeal to the infinity of a totality constitutes the main attraction of the symbol as opposed to allegory, a sign that refers to one specific meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered." Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (London: Methuen, 1983) 188.

[5] See Immanuel Kant, "From Critique of Judgment," in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 376-393.

[6] Imagistic poetry has been described by Ezra Pound as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time ... It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art." Cited in William Pratt, "Introduction," *The Imagist Poem*, ed. William Pratt (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1963) 18.

[7] de Man 189.

'symbolic' in the Goethian sense;"[8] second, he raises Gadamer's question[9]: "The basis of aesthetics during the nineteenth century ... was the freedom of the symbolizing power of the mind. But is this still a firm basis? Is the symbolizing activity not actually still bound today by the survival of a mythological and allegorical tradition?"[10]

In the twentieth century, mythopoesis is seen as the logos that actuates in temporality "the freedom of the symbolizing power of the mind." It partakes, first, of an infinite, if not an ideal, through the power of mind, and second, of the incarnate, through logos. In order to be comprehensible and iterable, logos requires a basis in tradition: whether it be historical/cultural or mythological, meaning is activated and invested in a context.

As we saw with Woolf, rigid paradigms of knowledge are ultimately reductive. Knowing can be tangible or intangible; both will be real. Mythopoesis, whatever its connection with intangible knowing or experience, exists as logos. Even though logos mediates between the tangible and the intangible, it is temporal, of time and space.

This necessarily raises questions concerning meaning in a text. In structuralist terms, the author controls the text, controls the entire scope of signification and the perception of meaning; it remains only for the reader to 'understand,' to 'dig' for meaning that exists in the text in some finite measure. The post-structuralist position holds that meaning is constructed in

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[8] de Man 190.
[9] See Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trs. G. Barden and J. Cumming (1960; N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1975).
[10] de Man 191.

an interface between reader and text, and that "only the reader ... can activate the 'intertext.'"[11] "Kristeva defines intertextuality as the sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning.... Meaning in literature is in part dependent not just on other texts which it absorbs and transforms, but on the reader's recognition and activation of that intertextual process."[12]

However, whereas all logos involves "the reader's recognition and activation of ... intertextual process," not all logos is mythopoesis. In mythopoesis, the logos resonates in several 'realities' or 'dimensions' at once, enabling the reader to activate intertext of which the writer may have no idea: the tension between the infinite and the temporal allows for the creation of a new whole. Wilde contends that "a painter is limited, not to what he sees in nature, but to what upon canvas may be seen."[13] The poet is similarly limited by the bounds of logos and the possibilities of intertextuality. Nonetheless, mythopoesis is that *class* of writing (to borrow Wilde's rhetoric) which entertains the greatest potential for both temporizing and detemporizing thought. In this way, logos is a sign, a sign-post.

One of the problems inherent in a discussion of mythopoesis lies with the word 'infinity.' It means, 'without limit' or 'boundless,' but it is especially associated with the concept of Deity. The word 'temporal' also bears such double-meaning: it is 'terrestrial' as opposed to 'heavenly.' As Owen Chadwick reminds us, Europe in the nineteenth century was undergoing a

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[11] Linda Hutcheon, "Literary Borrowing ... and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences, and Intertext," *English Studies in Canada* XII.2 (June 1986) 232.
[12] Hutcheon 236.
[13] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Rev. Vol. 2, gen. ed. M.H. Abrams (N.Y.: Norton, 1968) 1401.

process of secularization. Terms which had previously 'signed' a relationship with Deity were secularized, stripped of their heavenly associations. At the same time, some concept of the infinite, some concept of the temporal versus the non-temporal, some concept of percipience beyond the world of senses remained.

In many ways, Freud stands at the crossroads of this discussion of allegory and symbol, of temporal and infinite, of logos and thought. In Freud's psychology, the boundlessness of the infinite-as-Deity became the boundlessness of the personal unconscious: what had been outside the person was now inside, and infinitely 'deep.' His analysis of dreams is especially relevant to a discussion of mythopoesis.

Dreams as *magia* were condemned during Roman times, a condemnation which continued in the Catholic, Christian doctrine. Many artists, however, have reported dreams that initiated their creativity.[14] The Romantic "introspective investigation of the mind's mysteries" had given way, by the end of the nineteenth century, "to a philosophy of science which venerated empirical observation and looked askance at anything

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[14] Mary Shelley, in her "Introduction" to *Frankenstein*, has told us something of the ideas and images which she experienced in a dream prior to writing. Similarly, Robert Louis Stevenson has written about the dream which engendered *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As with many writers and poets, Stevenson reports the sense of being aided and abetted in his creativity by some outside power – he calls it "the Little People, what shall I say they are but just my Brownies, God bless them! who do one-half my work for me while I am fast asleep." Stevenson's memoir shows that all fear of the dream-as-devil has disappeared by 1892, and there appears to be very little connection with a God-given creativity: a strong sense of the 'internal theatre' is developing, along with an understanding that the contents of this theatre are connected in some way with the dreamer's waking life. See Mary Shelley, "Introduction to *Frankenstein*," and Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Chapter on Dreams," both in *Dreams and Inward Journeys*, 3rd ed., eds. Marjorie Ford and Jon Ford (N.Y.: Longman, 1998) 237-241 and 381-383, respectively.

speculative."[15] Freud's work with the analysis of dreams extended the connection between the dreamer's conscious life and the dream content while bringing the potentially speculative dream analysis into the arena of empirical observation. Freud completely secularized the dream process, bringing what had been *magia* into the realm of the scientific and rational. The infinite which was once of God became invested in man, and what once would have signalled a knowledge of God now signalled a knowledge of man. As H.D. writes in her *Tribute to Freud*, "he had opened up, among others, that particular field of the unconscious mind that went to prove that the traits and tendencies of obscure aboriginal tribes, as well as the shape and substance of the rituals of vanished civilizations, were still inherent in the human mind – the human psyche, if you will."[16] He articulated a secular, culturally-based theory of mind.

This is not to suggest that Freud was without his critics – far from it. "He was a little surprised at the outburst. He had not thought that detached and lofty practitioners and men of science could be so angry at what was, after all, chapter and verse, a contribution to a branch of abstract thought, applied to medical science.... that the whole established body of work was founded on accurate and accumulated data of scientific observation." [17] In spite of his scientific approach, his work was suspect:

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[15] Stephen Wilson, "Introduction," in Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trs. A.A. Brill (1900; Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997) vii.
[16] H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (1956; N.Y.: New Directions, 1974) 12-13.
[17] H.D., *Tribute* 76-77.

> In the dream matter were Heaven and Hell, and he spared himself and his first avidly curious, mildly shocked readers neither. He did not spare himself or his later growing public, but others he spared. He would break off a most interesting dream-narrative, to explain that personal matter, concerning *not himself*, had intruded. *Know thyself*, said the ironic Delphic oracle, and the sage or priest who framed the utterance knew that to know yourself in the full sense of the words was to know everybody. *Know thyself*, said the Professor, and plunging time and again, he amassed that store of intimate revelation contained in his impressive volumes. But to *know thyself*, to set for the knowledge, brought down not only a storm of abuse from high-placed doctors, psychologists, scientists, and other accredited intellectuals the world over, but made his very name almost a by-word for illiterate quips, unseemly jokes, and general ridicule.[18]

H.D. is suggesting here that the outcry against Freud's theory of the mind was connected with his "nonchalantly unlocking vaults and caves, taking down the barriers that generations had carefully set up against their hidden motives, their secret ambitions, their suppressed desires."[19] It may also have been connected with his disturbance of the 'new religion' of science and rationality. His work maintained one foot in each camp, secular and religious. As H.D. writes, "There were those Gods, each the carved symbol of an idea or

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[18] H.D., *Tribute* 72-73.
[19] H.D., *Tribute* 75.

a deathless dream, that some people read: Goods."[20] There remained the concept of infinite (now termed 'depth'), and the concept of percipience beyond the world of the senses, concepts which actively reminded people of what they could not control in a laboratory.

One issue which has emerged from dream analysis has been that of the shadow or double. Carl Jung and Marie-Luise Von Franz have theorized extensively on this concept, but as they came after Freud, and their major work, *Man and His Symbols*, was published three years after H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, we will restrict ourselves to the theoretical position of Freud, with which H.D. may have been familiar.

In essence, dream formation involves transference and displacement, a process which accounts for "the textual difference between the dream-content and the thought-content."[21] The dream is not identical to the thought, any more than a work of literature is identical to the ideas which engendered it. However, when doubling or shadowing is involved, "on account of the censorship it transfers the psychic intensity of the significant but also objectionable material to the indifferent."[22] As in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the double can be seen to represent the repressed psychic content, displaced into the literature as an 'open secret.' The dream (and literature) "actually misrepresents things by producing their opposites."[23]

Freud goes on to say,

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[20] H.D., *Tribute 93.*
[21] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trs. A.A. Brill (1900; Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997) 193.
[22] Freud, *Dreams* 424.
[23] Freud, *Dreams* 52.

> Where in social life can a similar misrepresentation be found? Only where two persons are concerned, one of whom possesses a certain power while the other has to act with a certain consideration on account of this power. The second person will then distort his psychic actions; or, as we say, he will *mask* himself .... The political writer who has unpleasant truths to tell to those in power finds himself in a like position. If he tells everything without reserve, the Government will suppress them ... The writer stands in fear of censorship; he therefore moderates and disguises the expression of his opinions. He finds himself compelled, in accordance with the sensibilities of the censor, either to refrain altogether from certain forms of attack, or to express himself in allusions instead of by direct assertions; or he must conceal his objectionable statement in an apparently innocent disguise.[24]

In terms of H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, the question before us concerns the transformation and displacement, in Freudian discourse, evident in the use of the classical story of Helen. If we look at the doubling which occurs, we see that the focus on the doubling – Helen in Egypt or in Ilium – is intentionally highlighted in the text, and that the privilege of voice has been given to the Helen who is in Egypt, she who has traditionally been without voice. This departure from tradition has been seen as a "feminist re-vision of the classical, phallocentric literature."[25] Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that, "From her

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[24] Freud, *Dreams* 52-53.
[25] Dianne Chisholm, *H.D. 's Freudian Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), Note 11, 251.

perspective as a woman in a man's world, H.D. resurrects matriarchal values and literally restores the desecrated Goddess (Isis-Aphrodite-Astart-Aset, etc.) to her original position of veneration .... Her purpose is to counterbalance what she views as the masculine 'whirlwind of destruction.'"[26] Chisholm extends this discussion by saying that H.D. addresses "the demonological psychoanalytic treatment of women.[27] However, if we apply Freud's sense of transformation and displacement in mythopoesis, then we would have to conclude that, interesting as these conjectures are, the 'psychic intensity of the significant' lies elsewhere.

In fact, H.D.'s Helen, being in Egypt, carries twice the 'normal' load of possible intertextuality. First we are asked to recall everything we know of Helen in the traditional Homeric myth. Then, we are asked to activate the intertext of Stesichorus (Plato), of Euripides, and of Goethe, all of whom touched upon the anomalous myth which held that the Helen seen in Ilium was a shadow, and that the *real* Helen resided in Egypt, blamelessly, throughout the Battle of Troy.

Thomas Swann calls these "poetworn figures" and contends that the poem "is more a filling out of an existing narrative."[28] He points to "the prose Arguments preceding each of the eight divisions in each of the twenty books" as part of the "weaknesses" in the poem: "One assumes that H.D. wrote the verses and then, on perceiving the difficulties for the reader in their occasional

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[26] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Creating a Women's Mythology: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*," *Signets: Reading H.D.*, eds. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau Duplessis (Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 375.
[27] Chisholm 206.
[28] Thomas Burnett Swann, *The Classical World of H.D.* (London: Oxford UP, 1944) 176.

over subtlety, their bewildering shifts in time and speaker, their complex genealogies, added the Arguments as a guide. The result is unsatisfactory."[29]

So far from being "poetworn," H.D. has created a new myth, which reads the old from the perspective of Gnosticism, and more than this, Moravianism, which is most likely a modern offshoot of ancient Gnosticism. This is the subject for which H.D. would have been censored if she had not 'displaced' it in her poem. Moreover, she had a drive, religiously motivated, to elucidate her knowledge, to *know* herself, to work through her belief-system, to confront all desire, and to pass on the Moravian/Gnostic knowledge in the time-honoured tradition of coded language.

Whether or not Moravianism was an offshoot, a quietened version of Gnosticism, is impossible to say with any certainty. The similarities are striking enough to have given H.D. a discourse for her experience, an experience which coloured her vision, marginalized her, and was alternate enough to require masking in order to avoid social persecution (as had been the case for Gnostics for centuries).

The Moravian Brethren was founded in the east of Bohemia. Their history is of persecution and wandering: the sect into which Hilda was born was helped to the New World by Count Zinzendorf of Bohemia. Moravianism seems to have been as much a culture as a religion for H.D., and thus religious beliefs are largely inseparable from her world view. Moravians believe, for instance, that the world is utterly corrupt. They were persecuted in their native Moravia for their resistant stance to the traditional Christian church which,

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[29] Swann 179.

like the Gnostics, they believed to be corrupt. Like Gnosticism, it is a matriarchal religion: one ritual, called the "Liturgy of Wounds," holds that "man – through the image of the crucified Christ – has 'died' in order to be reborn as a 'New Mortal' cradled in the lap of the Great Mother."[30] In *Helen of Egypt*, Achilles is referred to as the "New Mortal":

> true, I had met him, the New Mortal,
> baffled and lost,
> but I was a phantom Helen
> and he was Achilles' ghost.
>
> (Book Four [4], ll. 15-18)[31]

Moravian belief in another world is extremely strong. "Death is not a subject for sorrow," writes biographer Barbara Guest.[32] H.D.'s occultism is evidence of a vital belief in an afterlife: "She always sought out the world of the beyond, whether through table-tipping, Tarot cards, crystal gazing, astrology, or numerology."[33] Similarly, the Gnostics believed themselves to be exiles from elsewhere in the universe;

> Hence their feeling of having fallen onto our earth like inhabitants from a distant planet, of having strayed into the wrong galaxy, and their longing to regain their true cosmic homeland, the luminous hyper-world that shimmers beyond the great nocturnal barrier. Their

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[30] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 348.
[31] H.D. *Helen in Egypt* (1961; N.Y.: New Directions, 1974).
[32] Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: the Poet H.D. and Her World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984) 9.
[33] Guest 9.

> uprooting is not merely geographical but planetary ... man, then, is a lifelong exile on a planet which is a prison for the soul; he is the autochthon of a lost and invisible world.[34]

H.D. spent a great deal of time attempting to break through the barrier of that invisible world. As Materer contends, "Her occultism was an 'alchemy of the word' that never limited its importance to poetic symbol making. Unlike Pound, who simply drew heavily upon occult beliefs and symbols, both H.D. and Yeats may be described as true occultists."[35] He is suggesting that H.D. was not 'playing' at symbol making: her words were signs expressing gnosis through which the infinite was made manifest.

Her story, *The Gift*, appears to document her becoming aware of the import of her Moravian roots. Susan Friedman relates that, "By the time H.D. was born in Bethlehem, the Moravians had for the most part lost touch with their origin as a mystical and egalitarian sect. Certain distinguishing customs remained – the ritual love feasts, the kiss of peace, the pacifism, the flat gravestones, and the missions around the world. But the esoteric roots of those traditions, going back to at least the fifteenth century, had been lost to most Moravians."[36] The rituals included "love feasts, passion plays, ecstatic trances, speaking in tongues, and burning raptures."[37]

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[34] Jacques Lacarriere, *The Gnostics*, trs. Nina Rootes (1973; San Francisco: City of Lights Books, 1991) 29-31. See also Harold Bloom, *Omens of Millennium* (N.Y.: Riverhead, 1996); Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis*, trs. ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1987).
[35] Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1995) 21.
[36] Friedman, *Penelope's Web* 345-6.
[37] Chisholm 160.

These rituals may have held the clue, the connection, to Gnosticism for H.D. She writes in *Helen in Egypt*:

I said, I was instructed in the writ;
but I had only heard of it,
when our priests decried

papyrus fragments,
travellers brought back,
as crude, primeval lettering;

I had only seen a tattered scrolls'
dark tracing of a caravel
with a great suns' outline,

but inked-in, as with shadow;
it seemed a shadow-sun,
the boat, a picture of a toy;

I was not interested,
I was not instructed,
nor guessed the inner sense of the hieratic,

but when the bird swooped past,

that first evening,

I seemed to know the writing,

as if God made the picture

and matched it

with a living hieroglyph;

(Book Two [3], ll. 1-21)

These lines seem to speak of a moment when two discourses melded, the Moravian and the Gnostic.

The Gnostics believed that all matter, the entire world, is totally corrupt. As such, man's true condition is to "live in the heart of a misunderstanding so total that everything which surrounds us is in reality non-real, a reflection, an illusion, a distorting mirror, a phantom."[38] This, of course, is the issue with which the poem opens:

Do not despair, the hosts

surging beneath the Walls,

(no more than I) are ghosts;

(Book One [1] ll. 1-3)

The interjection, "(no more than I)," establishes a non-temporal relationship with the reader. Logos is phantom; the temporality reflected in the logos is phantom; the subject, Helen, is no more than a phantom. For all this, the thoughts are real. Stesichorus' Pallinode was a recantation of an "invective

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[38] Lacarriere 61.

against Helen" (*Helen in Egypt* 1); H.D.'s Pallinode is more a restoration to sight. It attests to what is real rather than what is phantom.

What do we make of the ancient Greek concept of the *eidolon*? It appears very far removed from present-day thinking, and thus the problem which is being presented as the heart of the poem inherently removes the subject from the temporal sphere. This is a form of the Judaeo-Greco literary device of pseudepigraphy. H.D. destabilizes intentional rhetoric: Helen is a myth, and everything about her is 'nothing but' story – a story about a shadow.

Greek myth is intellectually very rich and the intertexts are complex. Many of the incidents mentioned in the poem entertain inherent doubling. Clytemnestra is either Homer's wicked woman, the traitor-wife who committed adultery and killed the King or she is the last of the matriarchal queens who "claimed a queen's traditional right to choose her consort, and have each new one slay the old one." She is "slain by her son Orestes, a worshipper of the patriarchal god Apollo."[39] Since, as Meagher writes, "A main theme ... of Greek myth is the gradual reduction of women from sacred being to chattels,"[40] it is not difficult to understand why, in a feminist age, this should be the intertext we have chosen to read.

In the traditional version of the myth, Ilium is the 'real' world. The *eidolon* version allows the entrance of the intertext with Gnostic/Moravian

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[39] Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1983) 172.
[40] Robert Emmet Meagher, *Helen: Myth, Legend, and the Culture of Misogyny* (N.Y.: Continuum, 1995) 173.

belief. Wink contends "Christians have been especially fearful of Gnosticism because in many respects it represents the shadow side of Christianity."[41] Gnostic belief allows one to question the Trojan War as the battle between the matriarchal (Trojan) and patriarchal (Greek) forces,[42] even though such a concept is not suggested in Homer, who is the prime source of knowledge of this war. The obvious and traditional, through Gnosticism, inverts 'the psychic intensity of the significant' by becoming the phantom, the unreal, and throwing the burden of reality elsewhere.

In this case, the burden of reality falls to Helen in Egypt. What we know about Gnosticism comes from a few rare texts "discovered in the last century and a more recent collection which came to light in the caves of Upper Egypt after the last war."[43] Lacarriere also contends that Gnosticism came to its "fullest flowering"[44] in Egypt. According to Lacarriere, seventeen years after the death of Jesus, two people began to walk the roads, preaching on the eastern shores of the Roman Empire, along with many other preachers of the time. One of these was Simon Magus, whom Lacarriere terms "the most ancient of these wandering Gnostic prophets."[45] He called himself the Sun, Zeus, the Supreme Power, and is said to have performed feats of magic. His travelling companion was Helen, who is called the Moon, Athene, and

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[41] Walter Wink, *Cracking the Gnostic Code: The Powers of Gnosticism* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993) viii.
[42] Suggested in Walker 383.
[43] Lacarriere 44.
[44] Lacarriere 58.
[45] Lacarriere 44.

"Ennoia (Sophia), Wisdom descended from the heavens, the Mother of the universe."[46] H.D.'s Helen is also this Gnostic Helen.

The poem assumes the form of a dramatic monologue, and is especially reminiscent of William Morris' "The Defence of Guenevere."[47] In Morris' poem, Guenevere defends herself against the charge of adultery. The question of her guilt is the same as Helen's – and the response equally as ambiguous. H.D.'s Helen, if she were indeed in Egypt throughout the war, would clearly be blameless, as she is in Euripides. She *is* in Egypt, but the blame, and the actions which brought the blame upon her, have followed her as though they happened to her and not to an *eidolon*. One possible explanation for this would be her connection with the Gnostic Helen. As with Guenevere, Helen may not be defensible in patriarchal terms, or in Christian terms. Her defense, or perhaps one should say her defensiveness, may lie in her association with the Gnostic Helen.

She connects with H.D.'s sense of the need to *know thyself* through the Gnostic belief in man's condition on earth: "the evil which taints the whole of creation and alienates man in body, mind, and soul, deprives him of the awareness necessary for his own salvation. Man, the shadow of man, possesses only a shadow of consciousness."[48] For our own salvation, we must awaken from the sleep, the dream, which is life; we must become fully conscious – possess wisdom.

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[46] Lacarriere 45.
[47] H.D. was introduced to Morris' work by Pound. See Guest 4.
[48] Lacarriere 11.

Freud himself was born in Moravia and seems to have been sufficiently familiar with the renegade religion which bears the homeland's name to make H.D. comfortable with her sessions of analysis with him. They shared the belief in the importance of 'knowing oneself.' There is an interesting moment in *Tribute to Freud* when H.D. worries about Freud's sense of his own immortality:

> I am also concerned, although I do not openly admit this, about the Professor's attitude to a future life. One day, I was deeply distressed when the Professor spoke to me about his grandchildren – what would become of them? He asked me that, as if the future of his immediate family were the only future to be considered. There was, of course, the perfectly secured future of his own work, his books. But there was a more imminent, a more immediate future to consider. It worried me to feel that he had no idea – it seemed impossible – really no idea that he would 'wake up' when he shed the frail locust-husk of his years, and find himself alive. I did not say this to him. I did not really realize how deeply it concerned me. It was a *fact*, but a fact that I had not personally or concretely resolved. I had accepted as part of my racial, my religious inheritance, the abstract idea of immortality of the personal soul's existence in some form or another, after it has shed the outworn or outgrown body.[49]

What she says of immortality here is fairly standard Christian belief – the Moravians recited the Apostles' Creed as one of their rituals. Her 'deep

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[49] H.D., *Tribute to Freud* 43.

distress,' however, points to something that the Professor himself would need to involve himself in for his own salvation, something of which he did not appear to be aware.

In Gnosticism, salvation is by no means automatic. What you do here on earth counts. "The soul is not immortal by nature, it can only become so if man feeds and sustains this privileged fire which he carries within him. Otherwise, ineluctably, he will return to nothingness."[50] This is part of the "struggle against the generalized oppressiveness of the real."[51] To the Gnostics, Hermes is "The Wide-Awake," the one "who keeps his eyes wide open."[52] Hermes, of course, has played a large role in H.D.'s poetics. H.D.'s concern for the Professor points to a feeling on her part that, in spite of his work in psychoanalysis, his own level of awareness might not be sufficient to guarantee him salvation.

Memory plays a major role in this awareness. In *Helen in Egypt* H.D. writes,

> The potion is not poison,
> it is not Lethe and forgetfulness
> but everlasting memory
>
> (Book One [2], ll. 1-3)

Walker records that, in classical and Gnostic imagery,

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[50] Lacarriere 49.
[51] Lacarriere 50.
[52] Lacarriere 23. Hermes, of course, has played a large part in H.D.'s poetics. However, I do not believe that one can presume that the Hermes of earlier works is the same as the impetus for awareness in *Helen in Egypt*. This poem is her most mature work, in style as well as time of composition. A more-or-less simplistic understanding of symbols such as Hermes has been replaced with *gnosis*.

> The location of Lethe in the underworld … derived from the ancient oracular cave of the Earth-deities (Chthonioi) at Lebadeia, where one made elaborate preparations to go into the dark pit and learn his fate through "things seen" or "things heard." Among the preparations, "he has to drink the water called Lethe, in order to achieve forgetfulness of all that he has hitherto thought of; and on top of it another water, the water of Mnemosyne, which gives him remembrance of what he sees when he has gone down."[53]

Helen is saying that the process must be that of the mystery-cultists, whose training was "to learn endurance of thirst, for a draught of Lethe would wipe out their memories of their previous incarnations and leave them no wiser than the rest of humanity … The enlightened one should seek instead the spring of Memory (Mnemosyne)."[54]

Memory, in spite of being non-temporal, is nonetheless real. H.D. writes in *Tribute to Freud*:

> We travel far in thought, in imagination or in the real of memory. Events happened *as* they happened, not all of them, of course, but here and there a memory or a fragment of a dream-picture is actual, is real, is like a work of art or is a work of art. I have spoken of the two scenes with my brother as remaining set apart, like transparencies in a dark room, set before lighted candles. Those memories, visions, dreams, reveries – or what you will – are different. Their texture is different,

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[53] Walker 536.
[54] Walker 536.

> the effect they have on mind and body is different. They are healing. They are real. They are as real in their dimension of length, breadth, thickness, as any of the bronze marble or pottery or clay objects that fill the cases around the walls, that are set in elegant precision in a wide arc on the Professor's table in the other room. But we cannot prove that they are real.[55]

We have already noticed that the subject of *Helen in Egypt* is inherently removed from the temporal sphere. Within the poem, time slides, speeds up, slows down; Helen is maiden, witch, and crone. All time exists in one time. In Gnostic belief, time is "a condition appropriate to damned matter."[56] That Helen is able to play with time in her memory, in her poetics, is testament to the extent of her release through wisdom.

H.D.'s beliefs must also be seen in the context of the temper of her time. The topos of Hellenism was part of H.D.'s inheritance from the nineteenth century. However, unlike nineteenth century culture, which used this topos as a stabilizing force, a unifying principle in a dissolving world, the modernists of the early twentieth century manipulate the mythology of ancient Greece to be an expression of this dissolution. As Friedman points out:

> The starting point of modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth-century western culture: the loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and shattering of cultural symbols and norms. At the center of this crisis were the new technologies and

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[55] H.D., *Tribute to Freud* 35.
[56] Lacarriere 23.

> methodologies of science, the epistemology of logical positivism, and the relativism of functionalist thought – in short, major aspects of the philosophical perspectives that Freud embodied. The rationalism of science and philosophy attacked the validity of traditional religious and artistic symbols while the growing technology of the industrialized world produced the catastrophes of war on the one hand and the atomization of human beings on the other. Art produced after the First World War recorded the emotional impact of this crisis; despair, hopelessness, paralysis, angst, and a sense of meaninglessness dominated the scenarios of various waste lands in modernist literature. But these writers refused finally to be satisfied with the seeming meaninglessness, chaos, and fragmentation of material reality. In a variety of ways suited to their own religious, literary, mythological, occult, political, or existential perspectives, they emerged from the paralysis of absolute despair to an active search for meaning.[57]

H.D. also inherited the Nietzschean abandonment to pleasure, the Dionysian revival which "can be traced from early Romanticism through the 1890s as, variously, 'Decadent Romanticism,' 'Decadence,' or 'the fin de siecle.'" Laity argues that "H.D. and others used the Decadents to fashion a modernist poetic of female desire."[58] However, the difference between H.D. and the Decadents is of degree. Moravianism promotes the sharing of the awareness of God's love. Gnosticism goes further, calling for "the aggressive

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[57] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981) 97.
[58] Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) xi.

and destructive impulses of desire"[59] to be used up, thereby liberating and exhausting them:

> One must try everything, experience everything, unveil everything, in order to strip man down to his naked condition; to 'defrock' him of his organic, psychic, social, and historic trappings; to decondition him entirely so that he may regain what is called by some his choice, by others his destiny ... No knowledge, no serious contemplation, no valid choice is possible until man has shaken himself free of everything that effects his conditioning, at every level of his existence. And these techniques which so scandalize the uninitiated, whether they be licentious or ascetic, this consumption and consummation of organic and psychic fires – sperm and desire – these violations of all the rules and social conventions exist for one single, solitary purpose: to be the brutal and radical means of stripping man of his mental and bodily habits, awakening in him his sleeping being and shaking off the alienating torpor of the soul.[60]

Whereas the Nietzschean inheritance was a Dionysian abandonment to pleasure, for Gnostics it was an aesthetic duty. Thus, the irony when Helen says,

> "I am a woman of pleasure,"
> I spoke ironically into the night,
> for he had built me a fire.

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[59] Lacarriere 96.
[60] Lacarriere 98.

he, Achilles, piling brushwood,

finding an old flint in his pouch,

"I thought I had lost that";

(Book One [6] ll. 16-21)

Laity suggests that H.D. is part of an 'alternative modernism' through which twentieth-century women writers countered doctrines which insisted on "normative male masks, purgative conceptions of the female image, masculinist theories of love and desire" through "the dual textual bodies of Decadent transgressive desire, with their attendant grotesque body tropes, disruptive language practices, and sympathetic theories of love and sexuality."[61] Certainly, the traditional Helen in Ilium is a 'femme fatale' and Achilles can be seen as the male androgyne through the combination of his relationship with Patroclus before death and with Helen after death.

In *Psyche Reborn* Friedman writes,

> Given a different cultural climate, would she have openly and explicitly identified herself as a lesbian? .... I do not believe that enough biographical information is available at this point to understand the nature of H.D.'s sexual identity, preference, and experience throughout her long life .... Her epics of the fifties, like *Helen in Egypt* and *Vale Ave*, seem profoundly heterosexual in their portraits of love between archetypal woman and man as *Asphodel* and

[61] Laity xii.

*Her* are fundamentally lesbian in their exploration of erotic sister-love.[62]

H.D.'s ouevre has been embraced by critics as 'creating a women's mythology' and articulating a vision of female desire which rehabilitates such desire from the patriarchal straitjacket. Perhaps it does, but it also speaks to the extent to which desires remain encoded. Achilles destabilizes the primacy of the heterosexual reading of *Helen in Egypt*.

The encoded rhetoric of *Helen in Egypt* suggests that *outre*, in becoming *de rigeur*, loses something on the way. The encoded mythology of *Helen in Egypt* restores meaning and purpose to the disruption of traditional practice and belief by one who is an initiate to the mythopoesis. The obtuseness, the double-entendres, the intertexts superimposed one upon the other, which result in a metaphorical style "that cannot be called 'symbolic' in the Goethian sense"[63] are linked to the religious sense of the initiate. Gnostic teaching "was transmitted in a clandestine and underground fashion" in part because the content "was reserved for certain initiates."[64] There is the suggestion in *Helen in Egypt* that Helen has recognized Achilles as a potential initiate, a soul-mate (in the religious sense), although he himself is not aware of his status. Here is the crux of Helen's defense: that there never was cause for blame, according to her view of reality. He is unconscious of the unreality of his world-vision, of the fact that Helen of Troy was a phantom, an *eidolon*, and that his attitude toward her was unfair:

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[62] Friedman, *Psyche Reborn* 44-45.
[63] de Man 190.
[64] Lacarriere 55.

for I knew him, I saw in his eyes

the sea-enchantment, but he

knew not yet, Helen of Sparta,

knew not Helen of Troy,

knew not Helena, hated of Greece.

(Pallinode, Book One [7] ll. 20-24)

Achilles proves himself a worthy initiate:

Only Achilles could break his heart

and the world for a token,

a memory forgotten.

(Eidolon ll. 1-18)

ii) The Redemption of Sophia:

H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as Gnostic Literature

In the previous section, I argued that H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* could have a Gnostic project due to her Moravian belief-system. I explored her use of metaphoric language as mythopoesis, and discussed the doubling of Helen in H.D.'s text as an example of transformation and displacement in mythopoesis. I also began to look at some of the values and associations which Moravianism and Gnosticism hold in common. In this section, I argue more directly that *Helen in Egypt* is a Gnostic[1] text in which the doctrine of the recovery of knowledge of the world-order can be seen, along with the Anthropos myth, as well as the fall and redemption of Sophia. I show these Gnostic concepts existing within the ironic rhetoric of the classical myth of Helen, running "counter to the external text and the traditional interpretation."[2]

"Honor and shame," writes Norm Austin, "are the driving forces of this revisionist plot, as they were of the Homeric plot."[3] He is speaking of the anecdote of the Stesichorus *Pallinode* as told by Socrates,[4] but his assessment could profitably include H.D.'s 'revisionist plot' in *Helen in Egypt*. Critics have viewed this work as re-visioning the story of Helen of Troy, with H.D.

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[1] The term Gnosticism has been applied by scholars since the 18th century. Sources for knowledge of Gnosis comprised mainly heresiological literature, along with the *Corpus Hermeticum* of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., and other documents as outlined by Kurt Rudolph until the post-war discovery of Coptic gnostic books in Egypt, called the Nag Hammadi. The content of the library of Gnostic writings was made known by French scholars between 1949 and 1950, with the publication of the texts reaching completion only in 1977. The extent, if any, of H.D.'s knowledge of the texts is unknown. *Helen in Egypt* was published in 1961.

[2] Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trs. Ed. R. McLachlan Wilson (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 54.

[3] Norm Austin, *Helen of Troy and her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca: Cornell 1994) 4.

[4] Plato, "Phaedrus," *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*, trs. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Shane Weller (Toronto: General Publishing, 1992) 243 a – b.

having "chosen to wear the mask of Stesichorus."[5] If this were so, then the poem would address Greek concepts of arête and aischros, honour and shame.[6] Certainly, it does so by the simple fact of harnessing the most dynamic image of Greek social morality, the figure of Helen. But it also addresses the Gnostic sense of honour, which is accorded those who have gnosis, wisdom. As well, it addresses the Gnostic sense of shame, which resides in the critical event, the behaviour of Sophia, from which her repentance, suffering and redemption stem. The two stories are close enough to allow Helen to stand for Sophia; however, the anomalies of the poem, and much of its difficult temper, respond well to reading through the myth of Sophia rather than the Greek Helen.

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[5] Horace Gregory, "Introduction," H. D., *Helen in Egypt* (New York: New Directions, 1961) viii.

[6] Austin writes, "In her every appearance in the *Iliad*, Helen shows herself conscious of the scandal of her behavior at Troy, and the scandal that she would become in the songs of the epic bards. Thanks to the immortalizing power of epic, Helen would be forever remembered, but in her case shame would be her distinction.... But in the archaic period, when lyric poetry was emerging as a personal reflection on the traditional myths, a curious counter-movement arose to rescue Helen's name from the disrepute that had accrued to it from the epic tradition. Stesichorus, the sixth-century poet from Sicily, is the first in our literary record to give voice to this revision of the Helen myth. Sappho, Stesichorus' contemporary, though exonerating Helen on the grounds that beauty and the desire for beauty are absolutes that override all other ethical and social considerations, makes no effort to revise Homer's myth.... But whatever his source, Stesichorus presented his version of the Helen myth not as a variant but as a thorough repudiation of the Homeric story. Without Helen at Troy, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would fall to pieces.... The only comparable case is the revision proposed by Hesiod in fragment 23aMW, where he explains that Iphimede (= Iphigeneia) had not died at Aulis, because Artemis had spirited her away to become "Artemis of the Road," while substituting an eidolon for her at Aulis.... The *Pallinode's* project, to remove the dishonor from the traditional story by ascribing all Helen's ambiguity to her simulacrum, far from resolving Helen's ambivalences, had the unwitting effect of making Helen into a ghost of her own ghost, the negative of a negative. All that could be said of this revised Helen was that she was not that troublesome ghost who had caused the grief at Troy. If it was asked what this Helen had done while her ghost played at Troy, the answer was "nothing," since the only reason for this Helen's being was to be not – Helen of Troy.... Realism and idealism, the Signifier and the Subject, the woman and the woman-as-sign – these themes, which seem peculiarly modern, can all be traced in ancient Greek thought as early as Homer. What separates the Greek treatments from the modern uses of the theme is the simple problem of Hellenic honor. (2-14)

Of the many Greek intertexts, we will restrict our review to the Greek sense of social morality which, as Bernard Williams reminds us, hinges on the sense of arête:

> ... a picture of a certain kind of social morality, which does offer some impersonal criteria of who is to be admired and respected, but finds them particularly in certain kinds of competitive success and inherited position – an aristocratic or feudal morality. It was from the context of such a social morality that the fifth and fourth centuries inherited the concept of *arête*, 'personal excellence' (the standard translation of this term as 'virtue' is only sometimes appropriate, and can be drastically misleading). This term carried with it certain associations which Plato, and probably Socrates, made strong efforts to detach from it: in particular, the notion of being well thought of and spoken of, cutting a good figure. Here a vital term is *kalos*, 'fine', 'noble', 'splendid', a word more strongly aesthetic than *agathos*, 'good', and an important term of commendation, but bearing with it implications of how one is regarded; as its opposite, *aischros*, 'base' or 'shameful', carries implications of being despised or shunned.
>
> The deeds that made one admired if one was a Homeric hero were typically but not exclusively individual feats of arms, and one's arête was displayed in such. One could be shamed and lose repute not only by failing in such feats, but by being mistreated – such things led to the anger of Achilles and the suicide of Ajax. What happened to one

> mattered for one's esteem as well as what one did, and among things one did, competitive success ranked high: all this, of course, among those who themselves ranked high, for women and members of lower orders had other *arêtai* and kinds of repute. In this area, there are two importantly different points, which discussion of this subject has often confused. One is that, for such a morality, shame is a predominant notion, and a leading motive the fear of disgrace, ridicule, and the loss of prestige. A different point is that excellence is displayed in competitive and self-assertive exploits. While socially and psychologically these two things often go together, they are independent of each other: in particular, the occasion of shame and disgrace may be a failure to act in some expected self-sacrificing or co-operative manner. The confusion of these two things is encouraged by measuring Greek attitudes by the standard of a Christian, and more particularly of a Protestant, outlook. That outlook associates morality simultaneously with benevolence, self-denial, and inner-directedness or guilt (shame before God or oneself). It sees the development of moral thought to this point as progress, and it tends to run together a number of different ideas which have been discarded – or at least rendered less reputable – by that progress.[7]

One of the earliest discussions of Helen's arête/aischros is to be found in Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. This connected, rhetorical, pre-Socratic essay

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[7]Bernard Williams, "Philosophy," *The Legacy of the Greeks*, M.I. Finley, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 243-244.

challenges the judgment that Helen was a wicked beauty. Gorgias summarizes the situation as follows:

> She [known as Helen of Troy] acted as she did either (i) by a combination of chance, necessity, and the will of the gods, or (ii) because she was abducted by force, or (iii) because she was seduced by persuasion.
>
> If the first is the true explanation, then not Helen but her accuser is deserving of censure. For no human purpose can thwart the purpose of the god.... Therefore if Helen's action is to be attributed to a god and thus to chance, she is not to blame.
>
> If again, she was carried off by force and was lawlessly and unrighteously outraged, it is clear that not she but her assailant was in the wrong....
>
> Finally, if it was speech that persuaded her by seducing her soul, her defense is no less easy. Speech is a powerful force which can achieve the most divine results with a very minimum of bodily effort: it is able to dispel fear, allay grief, arouse joy, and stimulate pity. Persuasion by speech is on a par with abduction by force: Helen in being persuaded was compelled, and hence it was not she but her seducer who was to blame.[8]

Notice that Gorgias does not argue against her involvement in Troy, but simply against her being associated with blame. The purpose of

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[8] Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, ed. D.M. MacDowell (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982) 11.

Stesichorus' *Pallinode* was to excuse Helen's behaviour (by removing her entirely from the scene). The essence of the Helen story is seen to be the shame which marks her.

H.D. is certainly thinking of shame when she places her Helen in Egypt. It would seem at first that we are meant to read Helen as blameless. Yet, the poem proceeds with what we take to be its defense, which begs the question, what is H.D. defending? She has removed the supposed perpetrator from the scene of the shameful deed, putting, it appears from the Stesichorus intertext, an eidolon in her place. How, then, can she continue to bear shame? In fact, to the question of whether or not she was at Troy we are given the vital response of Paris:

> Who will forget Helen?
> as she fled down the corridor,
> the wounded sentry still had breath
>
> to hiss, "adultress";
> who will forget the veil,
> caught on a fallen pilaster,
>
> the shout, then breathless silence
> after the gate fell,
> silence so imminent,

I heard the very stuff rip
as she tore loose and ran;
who will forget Helen?

why did she limp and turn
at the stair-head and half turn back?
was it a broken sandal?

(Leuke, Book Two [3])

The poem suggests that Helen was indeed in Troy. She was vital, had physicality, and had an impact upon those around her. The scene is also offered from Helen's perspective:

Another shout from the wharves;
I fight my way through the crowd,
but the gates are barred;

are the ramparts free?
I am an enemy in a beleaguered city;
I find my way to the Tower,

(Eidolon, Book Two [3], ll.1-6)

How can she both be in Troy and in Egypt? H.D. suggests degrees of presence, that one can exist and yet be unaware, and therefore be an eidolon, or like one. In one sense, she was not in Troy because she "slept in Egypt."[9] In Gnostic imagery, to sleep is to be in a state where you have *forgotten your*

[9] Leuke, Book One [3] l.15.

*origin.*[10] (If you are capable of gnosis, then you are "a being who comes from above."[11]) When she tears loose from the veil she leaves one mode of being for another: she comes out of ignorance, forgetfulness, darkness, and moves towards gnosis.[12]

Gnosis is a specific kind of knowledge. Not intellectual, neither theoretical nor ideal, it is religious in that it centers on the background of man, the world, and heavenly meditation. Moreover, this knowledge rests less upon one's own investigations than on revelation, "made available only to the elect who are capable of receiving it."[13] The knowledge is the basis for the process of redemption. Ignorance, forgetfulness, and darkness are all evidence of a lack of firm foundation, a lack of gnosis. A divine spark (often called *pneuma*, 'spirit') must be recovered in order for redemption to be effected.

At the heart of Gnostic belief, then, is a recovery of the knowledge of the world-order. This includes not only the cosmogony of the "downward development of the divine,"[14] but also the cosmology of the "kingdom of the seven,[15]" which is conceived as tyrannical. The "kingdom of the seven" is

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[10] Rudolph 110.
[11] Rudolph 56.
[12] 'Gnosis' was defined at the Congress on the Origins of Gnosticism in Messina in 1966 as a "knowledge of divine secrets which is reserved for an elite" (Rudolph 56). With this definition in mind, we can see *Helen in Egypt* presenting gnosis in this circuitous format in order to reveal its ultimate secrets only to the initiated.
[13] Rudolph 55.
[14] Rudolph 57. The fall of Sophia is the prime example.
[15] I must apologize for this briefest of summaries of a complex system which bears such similarity to the ancient cosmic system as we have come to know it, and yet bears significant difference. The tenets of Gnosticism are still largely unknown, but perhaps this is precisely the point. H.D. herself had little enough to go on, even though her upbringing was in a religion which bore strong traces and resemblance to what we now know of Gnosticism. The meaning of Moravian ritual had largely been lost, and H.D.'s occult project is to reclaim what had been lost. By writing through a known and understood system such as the established

inhabited by the "commanders."[16] The "real ruler of the world is enthroned either in the seventh heaven or above it in the "eighth."[17]

Compare this to the chain of command in the poem.

> *This is the Achilles of legend, Lord of the Myrmidons, indisputable dictator with his select body-guard, the seven, of whom he, the eighth, received the directives of campaign. Technically, he shares the Command, as he calls it, with Helen's discredited husband, Menelaus and with Agamemnon, the husband of her sister. There is also, Odysseus, with whom we gather, there has been some plot or compromise. Achilles will compromise for once, though this is not his usual way of fighting.* (Pallinode, Book Four [2])

Achilles is situated to be the "real ruler," both in terms of his leadership of the seven,[18] and in terms of the gnostic hierarchy. His capitulation with the other three is "to challenge the celestial hierarchy"(Pallinode, Book Two [7], l.15), of which he is a part. Out of ignorance of his true origins, he sees himself as part of the demon 'Command':

> we were an iron-ring, unbreakable,
>
> they shared immortality with Achilles,

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Greek story of Helen, she is able to articulate the differences more clearly to the initiated. This analysis can only begin to peak at the gnosis of the initiated.

Moreover, it must be mentioned that alchemy and Gnosticism overlap, converge, describe each other, and sometimes are one and the same. Gnostics certainly made use of alchemical language and symbolism to create ironic texts.

[16] Rudolph 67.

[17] Rudolph 67.

[18] In the Gnostic planetary hierarchy, the kingdom of the 'seven' includes the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

the seven who could not die
while I directed the car of fire,
I, the eighth of the hierarchy;

(Pallinode, Book Four [2], ll. 5-9)

Both he and Helen are potential Gnostics: "our birthright bound us to another dynasty,/ other than Trojans and Greeks" (Pallinode, Book Five [4], ll. 23-24). Helen recognizes that he is an initiate:

This was his token, his mortality;
immortality and victory
were dissolved;

*I am no more immortal,*
*I am man among the millions,*
*no hero-god among the Myrmidons;*

...

it was God's plan
to melt the icy fortress of the soul,
and free the man;

God's plan is other than the priests disclose;
I did not know why

(in dream or in trance)

God had summoned me hither,
until I saw the dim outline
grown clearer,

as the new Mortal,
shedding his glory,
limped slowly across the sand.

(Pallinode, Book One [5])

Achilles' mortality indicates the falsity of what one thinks one knows. It also serves to question the value of an immortal hero – "(he was brave? an immortal/ to challenge mortality?)" (Pallinode, Book Two [8], ll.45-46). This offsets the Gnostic value system which holds that true bravery is to challenge mortality and *become* immortal, the divine spark being the birthright of all initiates, should they achieve gnosis.

Helen's moment of unveiling is matched by a similar moment for Achilles:

but is She stronger, I asked,
stronger than Hercules?
for I felt Herculean strength

return when I saw Her face;

I remembered my Power

and the world that I had lost;

(Pallinode, Book Four [7], ll.13-18)

With a glance, he has lost the world, yet he has gained the world that he had lost – his origins, his birthright. He has become aware, at least partially, of the true world-order and his place within it.

Both Achilles and Helen exemplify the "doctrine of the God 'Man,'"[19] known as the 'Anthropos myth.' Man himself is central to Gnostic theology. Between the highest God and the inner core of man is a relationship of likeness: the highest God is the first man, "who through his appearance to the creator powers gives them a pattern or model for the creation of the earthly (and therefore second) man."[20] We can see this 'copy of a copy' idea in the metaphor of Helen and her eidelon. The Paris-Achilles-Theseus trio exemplifies the movement from earthly man, to heavenly, to divine. The exaltation of man is "one of the most important aspects of gnostic mythology in the general history of religions."[21]

The mythological status of Helen, as the daughter of Zeus, and Achilles, as the son of Isis/Thetis, performs both as metaphor and veiling imagery for communicating the essence of the Anthropos myth. Initiates are not necessarily immortal, like Achilles, although their divine origins are

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[19] Rudolph 92.
[20] Rudolph 92. Another reading holds that "the highest God produces first of all a heavenly man of like nature (frequently called "son of man"), who is then the direct prototype of the earthly (and therefore third) man."
[21] Rudolph 93.

undeniable. They move through existences, from earthly in Troy, full of passionate life, to semi-divine in Egypt and on Leuke, meditating, coming to grips with their new understanding, to Gnostic in "Eidolon." There is so much here that it is impossible to do it justice with a brief interpretation. Suffice it to suggest that, as the narrator points out, "*What had she gained? She had gained "a rhythm as yet unheard"* (Eidolon, Book Two [4]). She has learned that "Paris is beautiful enchantment" (Eidolon, Book Six [2], l.1), and that the path to enlightenment has many desires and many eidolons, embraced and rejected. "What can Paris know of the sea" (Eidolon, Book Six [6], l. 1)? "What can a woman know/ of man's passion and birthright?" (Eidolon, Book Six [3], ll. 29-30). Each in their way is limited in their enlightenment.[22]

Paris before Egypt, Paris after,
is Eros, even as Thetis,
the sea-mother, is Paphos;

so the dart of Love
is the dart of Death,
and the secret is no secret;

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

[22] "For the gnostics bisexuality is an expression of perfection; it is only the earthly creation which leads to a separation of the original divine unity" (Rudolph 80).

the Sphinx is seen,

the Beast is slain

and the Phoenix-nest

reveals the innermost

key or the clue to the rest

of the mystery;

there is no before and no after,

there is one finite moment

that no infinite joy can disperse

or thought of past happiness

tempt from or dissipate;

now I know the best and the worst;

the seasons revolve around

a pause in the infinite rhythm

of the heart and of heaven.

(Eidolon, Book Six [8])

It is not that Paris and the throb of desire and passion that he represents is unimportant, but that he is life itself: he is "a pause in the infinite rhythm" and as such is central. Achilles would know this because he, too, is an initiate. "Only Achilles could break his heart/ and the world for a token,/ a memory forgotten" (*Eidolon* ll.16-18).

The last myth we will touch upon is that of the fall and redemption of Sophia. In H.D.'s text the Greek Helen substitutes for Sophia. This serves the purpose of definitively predating Christianity.[23] It also throws the weight of the significance of the text onto the issue of shame (with the suggestion in the Stesichorus intertext of possible redemption). The Gnostic doctrines of the origin of the world vary according to the region in which the texts were found, so that the Iranian systems (Manicheism particularly) posits a male being as the primary bearer of the 'devolution.' The Syrian-Egyptian doctrines posit a female being. Sophia is said to be the first 'likeness' formed "out of the boundless one."[24] H.D. seems to have had a particular cosmogony in mind: that of the Secret Book of John, which holds that Sophia was one of a bisexual "pentad of the aeons of the father,"[25] through her invocation of the twin-sisters and twin-brothers, Eros/Eris, and the perfect offspring, Helen-Achilles.[26]

Sophia's critical moment is when "in ignorance" she "became strong (pregnant) in consequence of the passion that was in her."[27] Her passion is a

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[23] According to Rudolph, Gnostic doctrine – even the doctrine of the redeemer – developed independently of Christianity. The figure of Christ was a secondary addition, and has caused the Gnostics to be thought of as Christian. (148)
[24] Rudolph 72.
[25] Rudolph 77.
[26] *Helen in Egypt*, Eidolon, Book One [5], l.14.
[27] Rudolph 78.

self-willed thought that produces certain consequences, borne of ignorance.[28] The parallel in H.D.'s text would be Helen's passion with Paris.

Sophia begins to be "agitated when she recognizes her deficiency and the loss of her perfection. (The movement 'to and fro in the darkness of ignorance')."[29] The agitation of Helen on the ramparts at Troy is comparable. Upon receiving her admission of repentance, "her consort came down to her in order to put right her deficiency... And she was not brought back to her own aeon, but because of the very great ignorance which had become manifest in her she is in the nonad (i.e. between the Pleroma and the realm of the Demiurge) until she puts right her deficiency."[30] The parallel in *Helen in Egypt* would be the meeting with Achilles in Egypt, and then the time spent on Leuke. There is no doubt that Achilles is seen to be Helen/Sophia's consort, and that part of 'putting right her deficiency' is her recognition of his role.

The importance of the myth of Sophia to the fate of man is that the divine spark comes from her and its destiny must emulate her fall and redemption. *Helen in Egypt* tells the story of the fall of Sophia, but places the emphasis upon her redemption, because it is a path to wisdom that all initiates must achieve. "'Wisdom' is for the Gnostic a many-sided phenomenon which unites in itself many aspects of his view of the world, both negative and

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[28] In Gnostic doctrine, she gives birth to the Demiurge, who sets himself up as a God very much resembling the God of the Hebrews. The doctrines show deep contempt for this "biblical God of creation and his government of the world" (Rudolph 79).
[29] Rudolph 80.
[30] Rudolph 80.

positive."[31] Thus, the abandonment to 'pleasure,' to 'passion,' was an aesthetic duty for the Gnostics – one of the important steps to redemption and gnosis.

the seasons revolve around
a pause in the infinite rhythm
of the heart and of heaven.

(Eidolon, Book Six [8], ll. 22-24)

In this light, H.D.'s Helen may bear shame and dishonour in the eyes of others, as the myth of Helen constantly reminds us, but not in her own eyes, as her (Gnostic) value system differs from that of (the Greek) Helen.

Conclusion

H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* is a complex example of the rhetoric of coded language. The poem shows its classical heritage not only through the obvious reworking of the myth of Helen, but also through the positioning of the myth as rhetoric – ironic metaphor -- for the communication of Gnostic awareness. This discussion could easily have been extended to include the magic inherent in Gnostic text: as with Jewish mysticism, gnosticism held that logos had magical properties and that words could be put to the service of transforming the universe. That discussion, however, has been saved for the last part of this study, which looks specifically at myth employed rhetorically to allow for a magical subtext in D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*.

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[31] Rudolph 82.

## III. Mysticism and Magic

### i) "Second Strength": Kabbalah in Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*

"Kate read this long leaflet again, and again, and again, and a swift darkness like a whirlwind seemed to envelope the morning."

*The Plumed Serpent* 243.

"Ten ineffable Sephiroth: their appearance is like that of a flash of lightning, their goal is infinite. His word is in them when they emanate and when they return; at His bidding do they haste like a whirlwind."

*The Book of Formation*, Chapter 1.

Lawrence is the last writer in this study, and possibly the most dynamic. His program in *The Plumed Serpent* is ambitious, not because what he has written is occult and difficult, demanding so much of the reader and barely holding together as a novel,[1] but because this novel was intended to change the world. If his words have life, in the Kabbalic sense, then there is a balance between earth and heaven today that can only help to heal wounds, right wrongs. It may be that the work is a 'failure' in conventional novelistic terms, but a 'success' in mystical terms. As mythopoesis, it belongs to the tradition of literature of transformation, and, like H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, includes 'secret knowledge'.

*The Plumed Serpent* is also a vivid example of mythic language employed rhetorically with an ironic sub-text interwoven. Whereas *Helen in Egypt* superimposed one myth upon another, *The Plumed Serpent* involves a

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[1] Humma calls it "Lawrence's most ambitious failure" (62). John Humma, "The Imagery of *The Plumed Serpent*: The Going Under of Organicism," in his *Metaphor and Meaning in D.H. Lawrence's Later Novels* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1990) 62-76. See also Virginia

new, mythopoeic, narrative creation in the threads of which are woven the text of another belief-system, in this case that of Jewish mysticism, and its inherent magical incantation. If *logos* has the power of transforming the world, then this narrative has the formula to do so. Lawrence's occult project was not to realistically revive an ancient Aztec god, but to metaphorically weave an incantation of transcendent magic. "Lawrence was able to believe in it as his major work and doctrinal summum while working on it."[2] The result may have disappointed him in that the world did not appear to change as the words formed. Nonetheless, *The Plumed Serpent* is far from the "complex and illuminating failure,"[3] the "ponderous and pretentious book,"[4] as it has been called. A metaphoric work of art, it does not fit the 'convention' of a novel and as such it is difficult to assess its artistic achievement.

A highly complex book, it supports "multiple mythologies."[5] James Cowan has shown the influence of alchemy on the textual metaphor.[6] The predominant myth is Aztec, but even this is not 'pure':

> A number of these details are consonant with Aztec myths about a paradise in the west, at the earth's navel, the source of the four directions and the four winds (itself the fifth). But the location also has features of the universal sacred center, with its quaternian elements, as adapted in Christian iconography; and aspects of the "new heaven and

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Hyde, *The Risen Adam: D.H. Lawrence's Revisionist Typology* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992).
[2] Michael Bell, *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (New York: Cambridge, 1991) 165.
[3] Bell 165.
[4] David Cavitch, *D.H. Lawrence and the New World* (New York: Oxford, 1969) 182.
[5] Hyde 180.

> new earth" of the Book of Revelation (21:1) are distinguishable in literal and symbolic settings. In the 'written hymns," the "water of life" is in Quetzalcoatl's hand, and a "Fountain" in the afterworld; both echo the biblical "fountain of the water of life" (Revelation 21:6).[7]

Although the dominant mythology of the text is Aztec, with the resurrected god, Quetzalcoatl, whose name was the title of the first draft of the novel, the mythology is by no means as carefully construed as was that of the Greek Helen in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*. Its metaphor owes a huge debt to the Bible, and the intention is truly occult – to eschew Christianity, but not religion.

One of the belief-systems entwined in *The Plumed Serpent* lies within all the others. In a sense, all the other mythologies perform rhetorically as compared to the ironic positioning of the magical incantation which is Kabbalah in the text. The Kabbalic incantation is like a ripple which passes through the text, "like a wind-shadow wandering over the water."[8]

Scholars of Jewish mysticism spend an entire lifetime studying this formidably difficult system of thought. I admit to having an exceedingly limited grasp of it myself, and although I am convinced that Lawrence's understanding was considerably deeper than my own, nonetheless he only made use of small (although vital) portions of Kabbalistic thought in his writing. It is pointless to attempt to 'prove' intentionality on Lawrence's part.

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[6] James C. Cowan, *D.H. Lawrence and the Trembling Balance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990).
[7] Hyde 181-182.

He has left no written statements concerning Kabbalah, nor concerning the alchemical or mystical processes of the novel – as indeed he ought not to have, given the magical injunctions of these occult systems. My intention here is simply to gesture towards the Kabbalah of *The Plumed Serpent*, as an addition to our understanding of this complex work.[9] I wish that I could say that I have found a scheme – certain consistencies that point unmistakably to Kabbalic theory and practice. All I can say is that the work is very complex, revealing new layers and depths with each approach. It is not 'pure' Kabbalah, but Kabbalah is the 'magic' in its make-up.

The echoes of Kabbalah in this novel are legion. Look, for instance, at the objective of this novel, which is to replace the worn-out religious system of the West, Christianity, with a newly resurrected God capable of reconnecting people with the life of their souls. Compare this with the essence of Kabbalah, which is restitution, *tikkun*, the general vision of redemptive restitution. In Lurianic Kabbalah, the world was created through the Shattering-of-the-Vessels, at which time the 288 sparks became divided, each person having only a small portion of a spark in his or her being.[10] The basic

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[8] D.H. Lawrence, "A Baby Running Barefoot," *D.H. Lawrence: Poems* (1916; London: Penguin, 1986) 46.

[9] *The Plumed Serpent* has challenged many Lawrentian scholars. To the best of my knowledge, none has suggested a link with Kabbalah. James C. Cowan has included a chapter on alchemy in the novel in his *D.H. Lawrence and the Trembling Balance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990).

[10] This concept of each person having only a small portion of spark in himself or herself is reflected in a way of viewing individualism that Lawrence iterates throughout his oeuvre. In *Apocalypse* he writes, "when you start to teach individual self-realization to the great masses of people, who when all is said and done are only *fragmentary* beings, *incapable* of whole individuality, you end by making them all envious, grudging, spiteful creatures .... No man is or can be a pure individual. The mass of men have only the tiniest touch of individuality: if any. The mass of men live and move, think and feel collectively, and have practically no individual emotions, feelings or thoughts at all. They are fragments of the collective or social

image of *tikkun* is the lifting up and gathering in of the sparks,[11] through which process one is reunited with one's soul. The whole of Kabbalah "tries to restore the primal meaning that God intended when He gave Torah to Moses."[12] Lawrence tries to restore the primal religious experience, to illustrate the *tikkun* of the Mexican people, and by extension of all people. Harold Bloom explains, "The *tikkun* or restoration of creation must be carried out by the religious acts of individual men, of all Jews struggling in the Exile, and indeed of all men and women struggling in the Exile that Luria saw as the universal human existence."[13]

One small detail that Lawrence pushes into prominence by entitling a chapter after it, "Fortieth Birthday," has far-reaching implications in Kabbalah. As Ashlag relates, "Don Isaac Abarbanel perceived in the words of the Zohar the glaring significance of the number forty."[14] Not only is it "the age of understanding,"[15] but one "must reach the age of forty"[16] before

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consciousness." *Apocalypse* (New York: Granada, 1981) 106-107. Rabbi Ashlag explains that "no man lives for himself but only for the chain as a whole .... For the majority of people in every generation were created principally for the sake of the righteous people among them ... for every righteous man there are to be found millions of worthless people .... there must necessarily be an enormous mass of people to every single righteous person so that they will be able to freely inflict upon him their vulgar tendencies by force of the quantity of them, for they possess no quality at all." Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, *An Entrance to the Tree of Life* (Old City Jerusalem, Israel: The "Research Centre of Kabbalah", 1977) 116.

[11] We saw this in H.D.'s Gnostic project in *Helen in Egypt*. The concept of the disunited sparks is common to Gnosticism and Kabbalah. Helen was concerned with awakening Achilles' spark.

[12] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* ( New York: Seabury, 1975) 80.

[13] Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* 42-43.

[14] Ashlag 18. "'For there were three who lived 120 years: Moses, Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiva.' (Midrash Rabbah Bayhi). Moses spent forty years in the house of pharoah, forty years with Jethro in Midian and forty years as the Shepherd of Israel. Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai spent forty years as a businessman, forty years in study and forty years in teaching others. Rabbi Akiva's first forty years were as an illiterate, the next forty years as a student and forty years as a teacher."

[15] Ashlag 116.

[16] Ashlag 17.

studying Kabbalah. One instinctively sees Kate's birthday as a threshold in her life, a mid-life crisis of some kind when she is examining her beliefs and the patterns of her life. This could happen at any point in the mid-life stream; that it happens at 40 may be a specific sign of the presence of Kabbalah.

Kate Leslie represents all manipulated people as she searches in Mexico, the physical equivalent of the emotional "plateau of death,"[17] for a solution to aging and death. "She was forty: the first half of her life was over. The bright page with its flowers and its love and its stations of the Cross ended with a grave."[18]

> The fact that the female hero does not martyr herself for others and that she undergoes the journey for her own benefit absolutely violates female sex-role conditioning, which teaches women to be selfless. Yet fundamental to the new consciousness she embodies is a paradox: undertaking a heroic quest to discover the true self is less selfish than the more traditional role of selfless helpmate....Indeed, the female hero learns a series of paradoxical truths. Self and other, mind and body, spirit and flesh, male and female, are not necessarily in opposition to one another. The hero's reward for violating the sex-role taboos of her society is the miracle of combining inner wholeness with outward community.[19]

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[17] *The Plumed Serpent* 50..
[18] *The Plumed Serpent* 50-51.

The Kabbalic sense of Kate's age signals that it is time for her to move forward into her mythic role as hero. It may offer a partial explanation of the ambiguity of positioning vis-à-vis Cipriano, and her reluctance to accept her role as his bride and as Malintzi. It is not only that she is torn between the old world and the new, but that, with her new understanding, she cannot be the selfless, mythic feminine, the *Shekinah*. Her role must be more complex, more capable of reconciling the paradoxes.

The complexity of sacrifice is echoed in the figure of the plumed serpent, after which the novel is named. Lawrence's drawing of this figure adorns the cover (see Fig.1 below).

Fig. 1

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[19] Joanna Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or, Why Women Can't Write," in *Images of Women in Fiction*, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Oh.: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972) 14-15.

Usually interpreted as a phoenix, rising from the ashes,[20] it is a familiar image in alchemical drawings. The following are details from 17th century alchemical drawings:

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Lawrence's bird is a composite of these two images, the one squawking on his bed of flames, raising his surprised plumage into the air, and the other high-stepping and lively, from a design in the 1616 publication *Cabala*.[21] Lawrence's term, 'the plumed serpent,' is more appropriate than 'phoenix' in that it has a variant significance through Judaic tradition. The phoenix rising from the ashes is a quintessential rebirth symbol easily

[20] See commentary such as Cowan, Humma, and Hyde.

associated with Christ. The Christian sense of the serpent, however, is irredeemably evil, Satan, the agent of the Fall, with the consequence of the loss of Paradise and the institution of the experience of death. Judaic belief, on the other hand, holds that "the system of the 'Other Forces' (of evil, *sitra ahra*) ... is absolutely necessary for the purpose of the 'contraction' (*tzimtzum*). This is in order to implant in man, when he is young, a vessel for 'receiving' vast amounts."[22] Evil is a necessary component of life on earth. The serpent performed a necessary service[23] by enabling enlightenment. Death in the Judaic tradition is not like death in the Christian tradition: we are all of us 'dead' until we redeem our souls.[24] Bloom writes that "in its glory [Kabbalah] sought, and found, a power of the mind over the universe of death." In the heavenly hierarchy, the Seraphim are the serpents, and the Cherubim are the Ministering Angels. Lawrence's 'plumed serpent' combines the two. The complex image of the plumed serpent supports a Kabbalic sense of the novel even as it speaks to other diverse traditions.

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[21] By Steffan Michelspacher, reprinted in Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *The Golden Game: Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1988) 54.
[22] Ashlag 81-82.
[23] See Ashlag's chapter, 'The Tree of Knowledge.'
[24] "We may hereby understand the severity of the punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge on account of which all mankind was destined to die. Death resulted from this eating as the Almighty had warned Adam "On the day you shall eat of it you shall surely die" (*Genesis*, 2:17). The reason for this was that the form of the great amount of receiving became drawn into his body from the 'empty vacuum,' and the 'upper light' could no longer exist together with it after the 'contraction' (*tzimtzum*) had taken place. As a result of this the eternal breath (*Neshamah*) of life – that is mentioned in the verse (*Genesis*, 2:7) "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath (*Neshamah*) of life, and man became a living being (*Nefesh*)" – was compelled to leave his body and his existence became dependent on crusts of bread. This life was no longer eternal life as it had been previously when it was totally for himself, but it was similar to a drop of the sweat of the eternal life. That is to say life became divided up into many drops in such a way that every single drop was a part of the previous life. These drops are the sparks of the souls (*Neshamot*) that were divided out and distributed to all the descendants of Adam." Ashlag 99-100.

Virginia Hyde discusses the complex relationship between Kate and Cipriano in *The Risen Adam*. Alternating between the text of *Quetzalcoatl* and that of *The Plumed Serpent*, she shows how Cipriano developed, through imagery which plays between neo-Aztec and Christian. Through Cipriano, Kate "secures serpent power, connecting her with the earth,"[25] for her to become a less cerebral Eve:

> This image of the Brazen Serpent, the typological symbol of salvation, recurs, albeit obliquely, in *The Plumed Serpent*. Cipriano, rather than being either the hostile dragon or the "poisonous" viper, is eventually identified with the "Serpent in the Wilderness." Shortly before the decisive encounter at Jaramay, he arouses Kate's desire – at the same time that he appears as the Brazen Serpent: "from his body of blood could rise up that pillar of cloud ... like a rearing serpent. In combination with the other motif from Moses' wilderness trek, the pillar of cloud, the "rearing serpent" strongly suggests the brass image that he raised to save his people from a plague of poisonous snakes. The image almost made it into *The Plumed Serpent* in a more obvious form, for Ramon, in one of the late excisions, tells Kate to inform the Europeans that "the serpent is desire, and they must put up his image in gold" (548). These high claims for desire are not simply frivolous, for this quality is shown to be what Kate needs to embrace a new life. It is Cipriano himself who embodies "the living Wish" (391) and who keeps

[25] Hyde 188.

Kate from leaving Mexico by saying, "*Te quiero mucho* ... I like [desire] you very much!" (444)

In connecting *The Plumed Serpent* with Jewish mysticism, it is my intention to add a dimension to the many learned discussions which have gone before. The issues of desire, of the marriage of light and dark, of the cerebral and the physical, to name but a few which are traced in the novel, involve complexities of metaphoric rendering from many systems of thought, as Hyde has suggested. Kabbalah encompasses many of these issues, also, and perhaps no one interpretation can ever qualify as 'the right one.' The only thing that can be said about identifying the tracks of Kabbalah with some certainty would be that it would suggest the magical properties inherent in the text.

There are points of difference and intersection between alchemy, Gnosticism, and Kabbalah. On the full drawing from which the detail in Fig. 3 was taken, the sign above the eagle's head reads, "Cabala and Alchemy/ Give thee the medicine most high." The two were not always separate, even in Judaic tradition. Judaic Gnosticism is equally well known. Alchemy and Gnosticism have much in common. Yet, the three systems of thought, and of practice, can profitably be separated. An alchemist need not be a Kabbalist, nor need a Kabbalist practice alchemy. A 'true' Kabbalist would be Jewish and would practice Kabbalah with the Torah, but Christian Kabbalists also employed Kabbalah, building one system upon another.

Why, then, would we say that Lawrence employed Kabbalah, and not alchemy or Gnosticism? James Cowan has argued Lawrence's use of

alchemy in *The Plumed Serpent*.[26] Some aspects of the belief-systems of the novel may indeed be Gnostic, and still be consistent with Judaic and Kabbalistic thought, such as the concept of the necessity of evil, and of experiencing evil in one's youth. Kabbalah, however, offers a novelist something unique: it offers the magic of words.[27]

Kabbalah came into existence in written form in the 2nd century A.D. with Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph's *The Book of Formation (Sepher Yetzirah)*.[28] However, "Kabbalah" means 'tradition', and its knowledge and practice were part of a much earlier oral tradition. It offers many of the components of the classical transformational rhetoric: the ironic processes of figurative language, the literary convention of prophecy, coded language, and, above all, magic.[29] It has always had the quality of 'secret knowledge', imparted only to the worthy, the righteous.

Central to Kabbalah is the sense of the 'divine language."[30] The "secret life of God"[31] is projected into the Torah, and the words are

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[26] *The Trembling Balance*.

[27] Bloom calls it "a power of signification rather than what we customarily think of as magic." *Kabbalah and Criticism* 26. The theory is neoplatonic; in fact, it derives from Plotinus. In Plotinus, emanation is a process out of God, but in Kabbalah the process must take place within God Himself. (25)

[28] See Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, *The Book of Formation (Sepher Yetzirah)*, trs. Knut Stenring (New York: Ktav, 1970).

[29] Lawrence himself added the classical dimension of mythic language by approaching his subject through the mythic figures of Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtli, and Malintzi of the ancient Mexican religion.

[30] Scholem explains, "Most if not all Kabbalistic speculation and doctrine is concerned with the realm of the divine emanations or *sefiroth*, in which God's creative power unfolds. Over a long period of years, Kabbalists devised many ways of describing this realm. But throughout their history it remained the principal content of their vision, and always they spoke of it in the language of symbols, since it is not accessible to the direct perception of the human mind. Insofar as God reveals himself, He does so through the creative power of the *sefiroth* ...which the Kabbalists identified with stages in the process of divine emanation. ...the emanation of divine energy and divine light was also characterized as the unfolding of the divine *language* .... The secret world of the godhead is a world of language, a world of divine names that

inseparable from God's wisdom – and especially the Name of God, YHWH. "The one true name, the tetragrammaton, is woven in a secret, indirect way, but also directly as a kind of leitmotiv.... The initiates, who know and understand these principles of permutation and combination, can proceed backward from the text and reconstruct the original texture of names."[32] "God...is the soul of the letters."[33]

Therefore, the footsteps of Kabbalah are the combinations and permutations of letters that, Kabbalistic thought contends, have magical properties. What happens in the upper world is echoed in the lower one, and vice-versa. The letters, which are inseparable from God's wisdom, make manifest God's wisdom in the lower world, our world. The Kabbalah is based upon the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These letters have a hieroglyph, a corresponding Roman letter, and a numerical correspondence, as Figure 4 illustrates:

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unfold in accordance with a law of their own. The elements of the divine language appear as the letters of the Holy Scriptures. Letters and names are not only conventional means of communication. They are far more. Each one of them represents a concentration of energy and expresses a wealth of meaning which cannot be translated, or not fully at least, into human language. ... they necessarily operate with the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet, in which the Torah is written....The Kabbalists do not start from the idea of communicable meaning....It is well known that in the Hellenistic period and later the Torah was put to magical use both by Jews and non-Jews: divine names gleaned from the Torah were used for purposes of incantation." Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trs. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1969), 35-38.

[31] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah* 41.

[32] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah* 43.

[33] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah* 44.

| NUMERICAL ORDER | HIEROGLYPH | NAME | CORRESPONDING ROMAN LETTER | TYPE | NUMERICAL CORRESPONDENCE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | א | aleph | A | principal | 1 |
| 2 | ב | beth | B | double | 2 |
| 3 | ג | gimel | G | double | 3 |
| 4 | ד | daleth | D | double | 4 |
| 5 | ה | he | E | single | 5 |
| 6 | ו | vau | V | single | 6 |
| 7 | ז | zayin | Z | single | 7 |
| 8 | ח | cheth | CH | single | 8 |
| 9 | ט | teth | T | single | 9 |
| 10 | י | yod | I | single & primary | 10 |
| 11 | כ | kaph | K | double | 20 |
| 12 | ל | lamed | L | single | 30 |
| 13 | מ | mem | M | principal | 40 |
| 14 | נ | nun | N | single | 50 |
| 15 | ס | samekh | S | single | 60 |
| 16 | ע | ayin | GH | single | 70 |
| 17 | פ | pe | P | double | 80 |
| 18 | צ | tzaddi | TZ | single | 90 |
| 19 | ק | qoph | Q | single | 100 |
| 20 | ר | resh | R | double | 200 |
| 21 | ש | shin | SH | principal | 300 |
| 22 | ת | tau | TH | double | 400 |

Fig. 4

The "Sepher Yetzirah" also offers complex meanings for each letter.

TABLE IV.—THE 7 DOUBLES ACCORDING TO "SEPHER YETZIRAH."

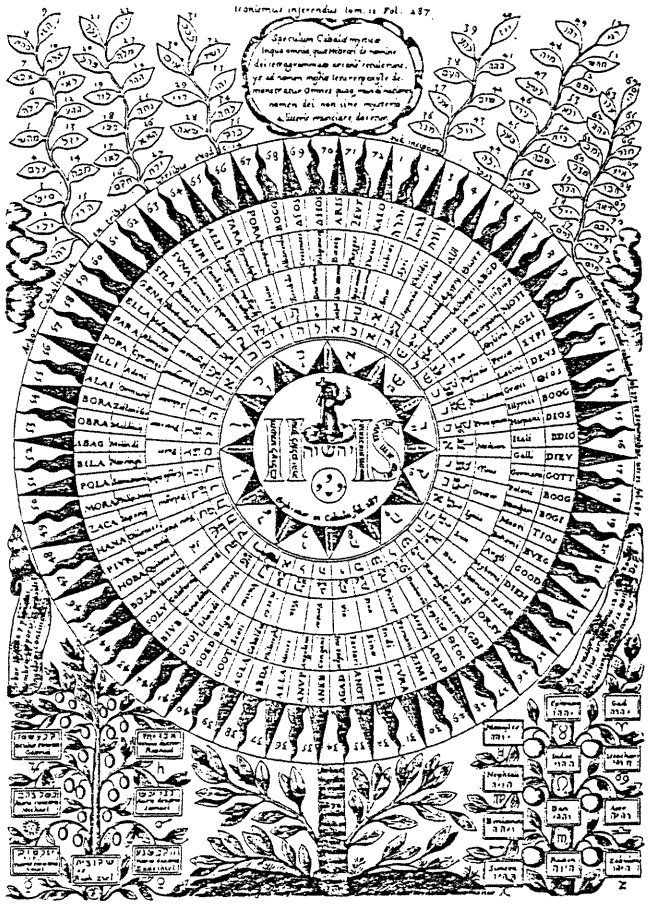
| ✡ | B. | G. | D. | K. | P. | R. | Th. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Their correspondence in space: | Height. | Depth. | East. | West. | North. | South. | The Holy Palace in the middle. |
| Their foundation: | Wisdom. Folly. | Wealth. Poverty. | Fruitfulness. Devastation. | Life. Death. | Dominion. Slavery. | Peace. Misfortune. | Beauty. Ugliness. |
| Universe (M): | Sun. | Moon. | Mars. | Mercury. | Jupiter. | Venus. | Saturn. |
| The Year. (A): | Sunday. | Monday. | Tuesday. | Wednesday. | Thursday. | Friday. | Saturday. |
| Man. (Sh): | Right Eye. | Left Eye. | Right Ear. | Left Ear. | Right Nostril. | Left Nostril. | Mouth. |

Changeable forces.



Fig. 5

Thus, an illustration of the Kabbalistic Tree has variations and permutations of letters:



*Frontispiece.* The Great Qabalistic Tree, after Kircher (OEdipus AEgyptiacus)

Fig. 6

Kabbalah can be seen in the numerology of the *The Plumed Serpent.* For instance, there are 27 chapters. 26 is the numerical equivalent of Yhvh, the name of God. 1 is added for the unity of God. [34] Much of the "combination

[34] See Lawrence's *Apocalypse* for discussion of numerology. He mentions the addition of the number 1 as "the nature of his wholeness" (99).

and permutation' of letters in Kabbalah is based upon the name of God. There are 26 poems, or hymns, in the text. The hymn, "I am the Living Quetzalcoatl" has 26 lines.[35] The last line stands alone in its own wholeness. He builds his "nest of peace" (l.25), 'peace' being the last word of the Talmud.[36]

"Four is the number of creation,"[37] and therefore the hymn "Welcome to Quetzalcoatl" (349-350), a hymn which commands a central place both physically and significantly, is written in four-line stanzas, as is "Jesus' Farewell" (279-280), which is fitting for the 'retiring' creator. Jesus' divinity is signaled by the number 3 in the italicized lines of the hymn "In the place of the west" (119)[38]:

*My name is Jesus, I am Mary's Son.*
/ ⏑ ⏑ / ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ / ⏑ ⏑
(My name is Jesus, I am Mary's Son.)

*I am coming home.*
/ ⏑ / ⏑ /
(I am coming home.)

*My mother the moon is dark.*
⏑ / ⏑ ⏑ / ⏑ /
(My mother the moon is dark.)

*Oh brother, Quetzalcoatl*
⏑ / ⏑ / ⏑ / ⏑
(Oh brother, Quetzalcoatl)

*Hold back the dragon of the sun,*

---

[35] *The Plumed Serpent* 344-345,
[36] See Ashlag 120.
[37] Lawrence, *Apocalypse* 91.
[38] Scansion is an imperfect art; discrepancies are always points of debate.

(Hold back the dragon of the sun,)

*Bind him with shadow while I pass*

(Bind him with shadow while I pass)

*Homewards. Let me come home.*

(Homewards. Let me come home.)

(119)

The same significance of divinity can be seen in the small hymn, "Mary and Jesus have left you" (337), which has 3 stanzas.

Perle Epstein writes that "the Kabbalist makes of his own breath a channel for the divine influx."[39] The very act of writing, of using words, becomes a mystical project.[40] Scholem explains, "A mystic is a man who has been favored with an immediate, and to him real, experience of the divine, of ultimate reality, or who at least strives to attain such experience."[41] The experience is rarely possible to sustain; the mystic returns to the worldly plane to articulate his experience for others to follow. The attempt to establish the new religious authority of Quetzalcoatl is evidence in *The Plumed Serpent* of the attempted articulation of mystical experience.

Cipriano claims to have had just such an experience:

> "I am going to be the Living Huizilopochtli," he said.
>
> "Are you? When? Does it feel queer?" – Kate was afraid of his eyes, they seemed inhuman.

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[39] Perle Epstein, *Kabbalah: The Way of the Jewish Mystic* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978) 60.
[40] The Kabbalistic style is "of parable and figurative language" (Bloom 23). Bloom goes on to say that "all Kabbalistic theories of emanation are also theories of language" (25).
[41] *On the Kabbalah* 5.

"On Thursday. The day of Huitzilopochtli is to be Thursday. Won't you sit beside me, and be wife of me when I am a god?"

"But do you feel you *are* a god? She asked, querulous.

He turned his eyes on her strangely.

"I have been," he said. "And I have come back. But I belong there, where I went."

"Where?"

"Where there is no beyond, and the darkness sinks into the water, and waking and sleeping are one thing."

"No," said Kate, afraid. "I never understood mystical things. They make me uneasy."

"Is it mystical when I come in to you?"

"No," said Kate. "Surely that is physical."

"So is the other, only further. – Won't you be the bride of Huitzilopochtli?" he asked again. (370)

The credibility of Cipriano and the role of Kate are both problematic in this novel. Cipriano gains in credibility if we view his experience through Kabbalic mysticism as well as through both his Mexican and Aztec roles. First, the experience itself is true to what we know of the mystic experience. Second, in Judaism, completion is only possible through the Bride, the wife in this realm, the Shekhinah in the other. Cirpriano needs his wife/Shekhinah. Thirdly, the name Kate (k—t) means the instrument, the force, through which

the perfection of reciprocity (the ideal state on earth) is achieved.[42] With this perspective, Kate's complex reluctance to assume the role of bride, for which she is destined, as her name suggests, bears yet more mythic burden than the design of the cultural recovery of the Aztec religion would suggest.

Finally, I would like to locate Kabbalah in the novel where it is most prominent, and arguably most effective: in the hymns. Kabbalah, of course, is Jewish mysticism: it both articulates and enacts the mystical experience. "Since all human activity has its divine counterpart, [Rabbi Joseph] argued, the Kabbalist's selfless "reunification" efforts on earth would restore wholeness to the universe."[43] Within Kabbalah, Merkabah (or Throne mysticism) is a specific form of mysticism: in hymn form, the mystic vision of being in the presence of the throne of God is presented: literally, "revelations about the heavenly chariot."[44] The act of creating the hymns enacts "the physical half of a contemplative experience which could not be performed by the mind alone."[45]

Merkabah explains the hymns of *The Plumed Serpent*, which describe the place from whence God comes, as well as the realm of heavenly activity normally unseen by the average person. Scholem says of Merkabah that it is "not ... a description of dangers confronting the mystic, but of a mystical transfiguration taking place within him."[46] One of the best examples of a

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[42] See Elias Gewurz and L.A, Bosman, *The Cosmic Wisdom* (London: Dharma, n.d.).
[43] Epstein 48.
[44] Scholem 7.
[45] Epstein 39.
[46] Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965) 60.

Merkabah poem is "The Lord of the Morning Star,"[47] which describes the nature and attributes of the Lord:

The Lord of the Morning Star
Stood between the day and the night:
As a bird that lifts its wings, and stands
With the bright wing on the right
And the wing of the dark on the left,
The Dawn Star stood into sight.

Lo! I am always here!
Far in the hollow of space
I brush the wing of the day
And put light on your face.
The other wing brushes the dark.
But I, I am always in place.

Yea, I am always here. I am Lord
In every way. And the lords among men
See me through the flashing of wings.
They see me and lose me again.
But lo! I am always here
Within ken.

[47] *The Plumed Serpent* 177-178.

The multitudes see me not.

They see only the waving of wings,

The coming and going of things.

The cold and the hot.

But ye that perceive me between

The tremors of night and the day,

I make you the Lords of the Way

Unseen.

The path between gulfs of the dark and steeps of the light;

The path like a snake that is gone, the length of a fuse to

ignite

The substance of shadow, that bursts and explodes into

sight.

I am here undeparting. I sit tight

Between wings of the endless flight,

At the depths of the peace and the fight.

Deep in the moistures of peace,

And far down the muzzle of the fight

You shall find me, who am neither increase

Nor destruction, different quite.

I am far beyond

The horizons of love and strife.

Like a star, like a pond

That washes the lords of life.

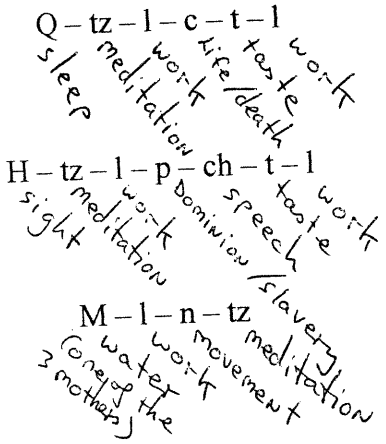
There are 40 lines in this hymn: the number of understanding. By the same token, the hymn "In the place of the west," which includes the Shekhinah ("My bride between the seas" l.39) is composed of 41 lines: 40 + 1 for wholeness.

One tradition in Merkabah is railing against conditions in the world. "What Quetzalcoatl Saw in Mexico" (256-345) is an example. Another literary tradition in Merkabah is *a'amei ha-mitwot*, the exposition of the reasons for the commandments, of which the hymn "Quetzalcoatl Looks Down on Mexico" (240-243) is an example. The "*First Man of my name*" (l.49) is the Adam Kadmon of the Kabbalic myth of creation. This poem also mentions the concept of sparks which is so central to both Kabbalah and Gnosticism: "Send me them by the swift way, the way of the sparks" (l.4). Sparks are also mentioned in "I am the Living Quetzalcoatl": "But the spark of me that is me is more than mine own" (l.16). The term 'the Living Quetzalcoatl' is reminiscent of the *Sepher Yetzirah* term, "the Living Elohim."[48] One wonders if the "Ay!/ .../ Shall you? Shall I?" in the hymn

[48] Joseph 17.

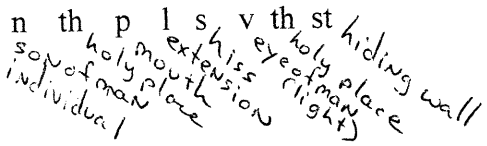
"Someone will enter between the gates[49]" (195) is not a play upon the chant of the Name: "Ehyeh 'asher' Ehyeh."[50]

Names, as one might expect in a tradition established upon the sanctity of the Name, carry a burden of meaning. Only the consonants are considered. Therefore:

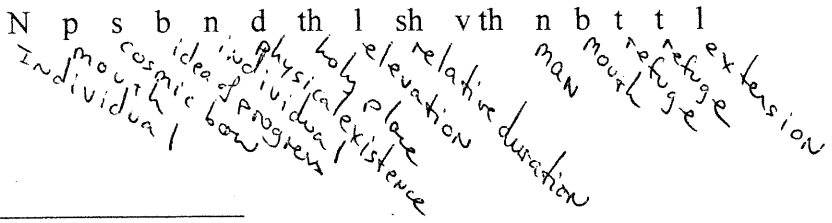



The same burden of significance can be seen in the consonants of the hymns. Consider the following detailing of the first two lines of the first hymn, "In the place of the west":

In the place of the west




In peace, beyond the lashing of the sun's bright tail




[49] A possible reference to the gates of the Sephiroth.

[50] See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988) 173-174. "God said to Moses: Go, say to Israel that my name is *'Ehyeh' asher 'Ehyeh* – that is, just as you are present with me, so am I present with you."

"In the place of the west" explains, then, that the son of man, the individual, by means of the mouth, releases the insight of the eye from its hiding place. "In peace, beyond the lashing of the sun's bright tail" explains that the individual, by means of the mouth used for cosmic significance, objectifies ideas of progress or movement beyond the realm of physical existence, the existence that lasts only a certain length of time, to gain a place of refuge that will last an eternity. In Kabbalah, it is more than coincidence that the significance of the letters echoes the intention of the words. The overall significance deepens. The permutation of letters is the essence of Kabbalic mysticism. The term "second strength" refers to this secondary insight which can be gained through Kabbalah.

Conclusion

Frederick Carter writes, "The great urgency, the call, the appeal, the peculiar penetration in David Herbert Lawrence's writing came from its mysticism."[51] Lawrence's vision is of a world beyond suffering and death. It is echoed in the Hasidic sense that "enthusiasm, not suffering, was the 'great way' for a man to unite with the upper spheres."[52] I have suggested here that Lawrence may have embraced the complex system of Kabbalah with its idea that words might have the power to alter the very substance of the physical universe, touch the fabric of the universe of souls, to make its power his own. The traces of Kabbalah in *The Plumed Serpent* point to mysticism which

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[51] Frederick Carter, *D.H. Lawrence and the Body Mystical* (London: Denis Archer, 1932) 7.
[52] Epstein 109.

includes magic. The novel engages metaphor, mythopoesis, mythic language, and, beneath it all, the ironic performance of the magic incantation which is Kabbalah.

# Conclusion

Northrop Frye contends that literature builds a bridge between the world in which we live and a world that we can build out of what we see.[1] Language extends its range by using words in transferred senses, linking old and new. Today, we are living with a perpetual sense of virtual reality, which constantly pushes the envelope of what we perceive to be real. Such a world would not only be limitless: it would be untenable without the framework with which we embody and support our thinking. Metaphor provides that frame, extending the boundaries of the possible while maintaining a link with what we know, what we have known. It is the ultimate experience of dichotomy: what Berman terms, "this sense of living in two worlds simultaneously."[2]

The writers in this study were living at the edge of change, in a world severely rocked by world conflict – a 'maelstrom' of upheaval of values, of community standards, and of philosophical visions. Their task was to "give [themselves and others] the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own."[3] Their response was not to embrace the chaos, but to move through it and re-establish limits in the broader beyond.

> Marx taught us, among other things, that even the ideas we think we believe most firmly may be the result of nothing more than false consciousness. Freud taught us to understand that almost anything we

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[1] Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* ( 1964; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1971).
[2] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin, 1988) 17.
[3] Berman 16.

> think may be a rationalization for thwarted desires. He also taught us that an underground stream runs beneath the surface of life, and that it is in the underground stream that the truth will be found. The hidden tunnel, the buried treasure: these are central metaphors of modernity.[4]

H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf each attempted literary acts of transformation through the 'underground stream.' The ironic metaphor became for each of them the way in which the shifting base of reality could be manipulated. They embraced the double vision of life and took control of the contents of 'the hidden tunnel'. This study has traced the 'underground streams' as rhetoric, figures of speech which are employed to argue not chaos and dissolution, but a new framework of ideas, new limits and possibilities.

For Woolf, the madness of the age and the madness of the mind combined to push the envelope of what can effectively be termed *real*. Her metaphysical explorations showed not so much a loss of self and voice as a regaining and repositioning somewhere beyond the boundaries of conventional articulation. Woolf's Gothic metaphor places the sense of loss but raises the spectre of abjection, through which what has been lost can be found. Thus, she revisions narrative integrity.

H. D.'s rhetoric is clever and substantial: she superimposes one myth over another to maintain the sense of dual vision, and to articulate the dichotomy of living in two worlds at once. Her 'underground stream' runs deep, and its *truth* reaffirms boundaries of perception and behavioural standards: alternate but definite. Her project is occult: the recovery of a

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[4] Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative* (Toronto: Anansi, 1999).

religion about which very little is known. Even in terms of her Moravian religious background, much of the force of the belief-system had been lost, having fallen into litany and ritual. *Helen in Egypt* revives the living belief, which in its dual vision embodies the experience of modernity.

Lawrence's project is also occult, but more ambitious in that he is setting one religion aside and proposing another which is as yet unformed. The narrative becomes, in this sense, the rhetoric by which the *will* is articulated – and the tracks of this *will* (Nietzsche's *will*?) are the magical incantations of Kabbalah.

Nietzsche saw the nineteenth century as expressing "danger... displaced onto the individual, onto the nearest and dearest, onto the street, onto one's own child, one's own heart, one's own innermost secret recesses of wish and will."[5] This study has shown that, for H.D., D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf, the danger has been faced. As Woolf says, after the experiences of the early 20th century, "we breakfast upon a richer feast of horror than served our ancestors for a twelve-month ... we are impervious to fear."[6] It was time to move on. Through ironic metaphor and coded language, mythopoesis and mythical language, they did just that.

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[5] Cited in Berman 36.
[6] Cited in Judith Wilt, "The Ghost and the Omnibus: the Gothic Virginia Woolf," *Gothic Modernisms*, ed. Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 62.

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