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Introduction

H.D.'s "classicism" – her lifelong engagement with classical texts, art, religion, and mythology – is an obvious feature of her writing. No other modern writer is more persistently engaged in classical literary exchange. Beyond incidental intertextualities, which are considerable, H.D. operates out of certain fictional constructs of the hellenic – partially articulated at one point or another – that overwhelmingly shape her conception of her vocation and of her personal affiliations. H.D.'s hellenism is the major trope or fiction within her writing, providing her orientation within historical, aesthetic, and psychological mappings.

Despite its centrality, however, H.D.'s hellenism possesses the same kind of strangeness, unpredictability, and obliquity that characterizes other aspects of her writing – her modernism, her Freudianism, her hermeticism. "For H.D. terms are either duplicit or complicit, the warp and woof of the loom," Robert Duncan remarks ("Part 2, Chapter 3"). So with her hellenism: it too is part of a large, lifelong fabrication, in which individual valences shift, alter, narrow, and enlarge. Her hellenism is more complex, intelligent, and subtle than critical readings – including perhaps her own late retrospective readings – have sufficiently accounted for.

H.D.'s classicism cannot be explained simply as a product of late-nineteenth-century decadence, or of modernist poetics. Nor is the current critical predilection adequate: to see her hellenism as a set of masks or personae, unreal disguises for a real, biographically or historically contextualized subject.[1] Though these critical models have undeniable validity, they do not sufficiently address the specific character of H.D.'s engagement with classical writers and with the complexities of classical transmission. It is necessary to approach the question of H.D.'s classical intertextuality with the primary assumption that she is a knowledgeable and insightful reader, translator, and interpreter, and not simply a

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projector of meanings, reconstituting symbolic texts according to personal urgencies. Thus I have tried to account for the specific nature of H.D.'s readings and interpretations, her engagement with classical writers at the level of language, image, and theme.

It is apparent as well that H.D.'s hellenism is not univocal in its emphases. There is not one hellenism, not one monologic "Greek persona," but very many: many *topoi*; many sites within an imagined geography; many historical moments; many focal writers or "generating masters," in Duncan's phrase ("Two Chapters" 86), each of whom has a distinct character as a surviving image, or *eidolon*, of the dead. Moreover, a consideration of H.D.'s hellenic intertextuality over decades of her career makes clear a large interpretative pattern with considerable historical, philosophical, and religious complexity.

The effort of this book is to define the nature of H.D.'s famous classicism, which entails as well a tracing of its genealogies. I have attempted to delineate accurately H.D.'s classical exchanges, and at the same time to contextualize her fictions of the classical not only within modernism but within precedent classicisms. What began as an effort to locate H.D.'s "sources" and "influences" has ended in being a reflection on the "lines" of Western classicism, in the context of H.D.'s idiosyncratic but finally coherent tracings.

In using words and phrases such as "line," "lineage," "transmission," "descent," "classical letters," and "survival of the classics," I adopt self-consciously a traditionally classic model of literary history, aristocratic and patrilineal, because this is undeniably the model in which classicisms have imagined themselves and which H.D. too had to negotiate. "Dissemination," in the sense suggested by Jacques Derrida, may be closer to H.D.'s apprehension of her nonlinear relation to ancient writers. According to Barbara Johnson, dissemination, for Derrida, "is what subverts all such recuperative gestures of mastery. It is what foils the attempt to progress in an orderly way toward meaning or knowledge, what breaks the circuit of intentions or expectations through some ungovernable excess or loss" (xxxii). H.D. consistently veers from the linearity, seminality, and totality of certain classical models, preferring in her affiliations and in her imagination of literary history something like an antimodel involving dissemination, dispersion, and diaspora.

Though H.D.'s hellenism spans the whole of her career, one may discern different phases in her engagement with it. First is the early, prewar project of imagism, conceived by Ezra Pound in terms of T. E. Hulme's modern classicism but envisioned by H.D. and by her husband, Richard Aldington, very much within hellenic terms, specifically in terms of late-nineteenth-century romantic hellenism. After the war and its attendant traumas, H.D. persists throughout the twenties in exploring imaginatively the sites of her early hellenic engagements – the Greek Anthology, Sappho, Theocritus, and Euripides. But just as in her poetry and narratives of this period she begins the process of figuring out and

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working through the psychological binds of her early years, so too she becomes increasingly self-conscious about the character and genealogy of her hellenism. Her narratives – in particular "Hipparchia" (*Palimpsest*) and *Hedylus*, in each of which she stages herself as a displaced hellenistic poet – constitute an intelligent reflection upon her early Greek orientation. Though she makes explicit attempts in essay form to explicate the hellenic, prominently in the unpublished "Notes on Euripides, Pausanius, and Greek Lyric Poets," the hellenistic narratives are a more successful effort. Here one sees H.D. engaged not simply in biographical projection but in a complex mode of historical and cultural analysis, as well as self-analysis, within which she holds her own hellenic models up to scrutiny and articulation and elaborates a theory of history in which they are situated. H.D. increasingly understands the character of her hellenism, serving as an elaborate trope for the amalgam of experiences – both personal and cultural – in her early years. Thus she comes to detach herself from identification with particular figures in order to reflect upon recurrent patterns of interrelationships.[2] That self-consciousness has an initial and premature climax in 1927 with the verse-drama *Hippolytus Temporizes*, in which H.D. enacts the death of the hellenic rhapsodist. It comes to a completion of sorts with her analysis with Freud in 1934 and 1935, when she places hellenic nostalgia in the context of her family history. In the aftermath of her Freudian analysis she returns to a project of the prewar years, a translation of Euripides' *Ion* (1937), which lays to rest some of the recurrent preoccupations, not to say obsessions, within H.D.'s hellenic iconography. After *Euripides' Ion*, H.D. does not significantly engage the hellenic again until her late career in *Helen in Egypt*, when she takes up Euripides' *Helen* and, through Euripides, attempts a kind of synthesis of her governing poetic and personal fictions.

If indeed H.D.'s self-consciousness about her hellenism increases, what does she come to see? The answer to this question is constituted in the recurrent emphases of this book. Hellenism seems for her always contextualized by war. This is not merely a matter of H.D.'s own biography, in which her early shared hellenic aspirations were shattered by her experience of World War I. Rather, hellenism itself seems intrinsically linked to and brought into definition by wars, and the classic as a concept is bound to the notion of recurrent cultural catastrophe.

H.D. also grows increasingly aware of her lineage as a hellenist. She never outgrows her affiliations with late-romantic hellenists of the French and English decadence and with the Alexandrian model in which they imagine themselves. Rather she takes that model more seriously than any precedent or modern writer, except her Alexandrian contemporary C. P. Cavafy. She imagines herself in a classical line descending from Alexandria. This model helps to situate some of H.D.'s semantic overlays: the association of hellenism with nostalgia, with heterodox eroticism, with hermeticism. This Alexandrian hellenism is not merely a

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local late-nineteenth-century obsession but indeed constitutes a strand within Western classicism, albeit one held in suspicion and contempt within normative Latin models of order.

Whether carried in the trope of Athens or of Alexandria, H.D.'s hellenic nostalgia is oriented toward the figure of the mother, who is occluded within father and hero worship. The recognition of this matrix of desire in her life and art comes to H.D. with increasing clarity over the course of decades. Shaped especially by Susan Friedman's writing, this study points to H.D.'s recurrent recognition of the significance of the maternal within psychological and cultural life. However, it also testifies, as has Friedman, to the power of paternal authority in H.D.'s imagination, especially as this is figured in hellenism and in the public appropriation of the ancients by what H.D. calls the "academic Grecians" ("Helios and Athene," *Collected Poems* 328). Much as H.D. appears at times to stand against these scholarly guardians of the truth in defense of female daimonic power, she never surrenders her fascination with and longing for the authoritative father-scientist.

Though this brief summary suggests a developmental reading based on the chronological sequence of H.D.'s writing, *H.D. and Hellenism* is not so arranged. The book is divided into two parts, the first examining some of the contexts in which H.D.'s hellenism may be situated, the second considering H.D.'s exchanges with individual classical writers. Because H.D.'s hellenism was constructed within fin-de-siècle and early modern contexts, and because her most intense exploration of hellenic fictions occurs before the thirties, this study is in large part an exploration of H.D.'s early career, spanning roughly the period from her first publication of poetry in 1912 to the publication of *Hippolytus Temporizes* in 1927. Only the concluding chapter on H.D.'s Euripidean texts attempts a chronological reading, because H.D.'s engagement with Euripides remains consistent throughout her career, resurfacing at crucial junctures in her life.

The first part of this volume describes the generative matrix of H.D.'s hellenism in the models, iconographies, and ideologies operative in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many different fictions of the classical are in circulation at the time H.D. begins to write, and my attempt has been to differentiate the classical agendas that shaped early modernists like H.D., Pound, T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence. But this effort – far beyond my original intention – has entailed a regression in the hall of mirrors called classicism, taking me back through the nineteenth century, to the early Renaissance, and finally to Alexandria.

I begin with a consideration of the most immediate context of H.D.'s hellenic writing: the theater of war, the literal experience of war, but also the critical "war of words" that in large part initiated early modernism,[3] the polemical opposition of romantic and classic, and the call by T. E. Hulme, Eliot, Pound, and others for a new classicism. The synchronicity of these two wars is not accidental, and

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H.D.'s war trauma, lived out over decades, is professional as well as personal. This debate has in pivotal ways shaped H.D.'s critical reputation – and indeed still shapes it – as it established norms of classical legitimacy that at first included then firmly excluded her poetic experiments.

Chapter Two examines the question of classical lineage and the problematic status of a woman within the traditionally male domain of classical letters. Because modernists imagine themselves in the fiction of classical recovery, they turn their attention to a definition of a "true" classical descent, differentiating the authentic from the deviant or decadent lines. H.D. too imagined herself in terms of classical recovery, but because true descent in modern classicism is imagined as patrilineal, H.D. is faced with a pressing necessity to delineate her classical affiliations in alternative terms. Thus she boldly situates herself within the contaminated and despised territories of literary decadence, and in *Palimpsest* attempts to work out a nonlinear mode of female transmission.

Chapters Three and Four attempt to articulate in some detail the ground of early modernist fascination with gods and with mystery religions. Aesthetic mysticism of the decadence provides a coherent language of "pagan mysteries," taking these emphases from dominant lines within romantic hellenism. In Chapter Three, I consider in some detail the writings of Walter Pater as they articulate the emphases and iconography of romantic hellenism. Another dimension of early modernist preoccupation with the gods is the revolution in archaeology and anthropology that necessitated a serious reflection upon the nature of religious cults and, in the discussion of ritual and drama, a renewal of the romantic claims for the relation between religion and art. In Chapter Four, I take Jane Ellen Harrison as a main point of reference in delineating aspects of this religious recovery. Neither Pater nor Harrison is explicitly prominent among H.D.'s nineteenth-century star names, such as Wilde, Swinburne, and Frazer, and thus my emphasis here may seem odd. Nevertheless, each of these figures, ignored in explications of modernism until recently, represents a nexus within the dissemination of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary ideas. Thus they allow a way of articulating features of hellenic iconography and religious language that are very much at play among early modernists.

The second part of this volume attempts to assess as specifically as possible the character of H.D.'s classical intertextuality. Chapter Five considers the classical figures most important in H.D.'s lyric writing, taking as its basis a catalogue of references to classical texts in *Collected Poems, 1912–1944*, given in the Appendix. Here I examine not only H.D.'s specific exchanges with Euripides, Sappho, Theocritus, the poets of the Greek Anthology, and Homer, but a more general intertextuality – the way in which each writer allows a certain technical experimentation and defines a fiction having its own themes and predominant voice or voices. Chapter Six constitutes an examination of H.D.'s lifelong engagement with the plays of Euripides. This writer is the central figure within H.D.'s

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hellenism, standing in her own formulation as a kind of double for her as a modernist, a lyricist, and a "mystic" ("Euripides" 1–2). As an ancient generating master – father, scientist, psychopomp – he has a place in her literary project analogous to that of Freud in her autobiographical project. Throughout her life, Euripides' texts become sites of psychic enactment and reflection, serving as do her narratives – as Friedman argues in *Penelope's Web* – as kinds of "dream work" and self-analysis.

What has seemed primary in this project is an account of H.D.'s hellenism as she herself figures and articulates it, an analysis of it – at least initially – in its own complex terms. Such a reconstruction has seemed necessary for efforts of more sophisticated interpretation. I have not approached this material within any specific theoretical construct, which might have coerced and excised the evidence even while it was being assembled. Thus the critical orientation here is fairly eclectic, and the interpretative models employed provisional and local.

Contemporary theoretical constructs allow remarkable access to H.D.'s writing, and I have benefited from many of these, especially from various feminist readings – the groundbreaking work of Friedman in particular, as well as other psychoanalytical and New Historicist approaches. H.D. certainly appears at times fundamentally deconstructive, and many recent critics have turned specifically to formulations of Julia Kristeva in attempting to locate H.D.'s modes of linguistic resistance. Sensing the limitation of such models, however, critics like Adalaide Morris have employed anthropological models that very differently illumine the social agenda of H.D.'s writing. Given clues by recent commentary, I have found myself surprisingly aware of H.D's rhetorical strategies in both poetry and prose, suspecting some of her postures and duplicities, but admiring the courage of her risky moves. Nevertheless, I have found myself resistant to aspects of the postmodern climate governing H.D.'s reclamation, resistant to its hierarchies of praise and blame, which often seem to recapitulate the modernist terms of invalidation that have so dominated the reception of her writing. At crucial points, in the spirit of H.D.'s instinctive heterodoxy, I have attempted an apology for dispositions currently considered unacceptable: a defense of nostalgia, for instance, so virulently despised by modernists and postmodernists alike, and of the lyric, the focus of special contempt in deconstruction.

H.D.'s classicism first attracted me to the study of her writing, but her keen-edged heterodoxy, rebelliousness, and surprising strangeness have sustained my fascination and compelled my labor. In this regard two poets are implicit and sometimes explicit guides within my critical orientation: William Blake the iconoclast, who kept reappearing with uncanny appropriateness in my musings on H.D.'s Greece; and Duncan, who profoundly and comprehensively articulates H.D.'s heretical edge, defending her against the "Historians of Opprobrium" and valuing in her writing precisely those qualities that "[rescue] the work from what is correct and invulnerable" (*Selected Poems* 115; "Beginnings" 10). If one ac-

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knowledges her kind of legitimacy, H.D. leads one inevitably into heterodoxies of many kinds. She is remarkably shameless. She has in the past incurred and she will continue to incur the censure of any critic who assumes an orthodoxy dictating the boundaries of the shameful.

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PART I

Contexts

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Chapter One

Modern Classicism and the Theater of War

"The Classics, it is the Classics! & not Goths nor Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars." William Blake's remark might be taken simply as a reaction to eighteenth-century neoclassicism or, in terms of his own work, as a charge against the "Classics" as instruments of Urizen in the suppression of Orc. However, one might consider Blake's words in a more immediate way: the classicism of early literary modernism in the context of a century desolated by wars. To consider the synchronicity of classicism and war, one must admit, with Blake, that art forcefully shapes the world, that wars, as Paul Fussell has argued, are matters of imagination and of language and, not in the sublime but in the specific, pragmatic sense, matters of literary training and common reading, of culturally assimilated tropes and poetic patterns (ix).

The "Classics" to which Blake here refers are the Greek and Roman texts, such as Homer and Virgil, favored in Renaissance humanism. However, in this short meditation ("On Homer's Poetry" 267), he charges not so much the ancient works themselves as their exegetes. The classics are agents of desolation as they are instrumented through the pedagogy of the learned schools. Blake here specifically attacks the folly of abstract neoclassical norms in assessing the character or quality of poetry. Unity and Morality, he says, are "secondary considerations & belong to Philosophy & not to Poetry, to Exception & not to Rule, to Accident & not to Substance." But more than this irrelevance, Unity and Morality, as critical laws governing the interpretation of literature, have a venomous resolution: "Those who will have Unity exclusively in Homer come out with a Moral like a sting in the tail." This vicious, scorpion-like turn of the tale might be taken as the unstated link (in Blake's thought) between the classics and war. One can only infer that he sees this classical exegesis to have pragmatic consequence in the training of the public men who conceive of wars and bring them to birth.

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In her early review of W. B. Yeats's *Responsibilities* (1916–18), H.D. reflects upon the destructiveness of her own generation in World War I: "Our generation did not stand against the enemy – it *was* the enemy" ("Responsibilities" 53). Here H.D. addresses, like Blake, the haunting correlation between art and violence. As Gary Burnett has argued,[1] H.D. recognized, within the turmoil surrounding World War I, the conjunction of mechanistic ideologies and images of war with avant-garde movements such as vorticism and cubism – genuflection, in H.D.'s words, to "some Juggernaut of planes and angles." Her review suggests the confusion of her own generation in summoning the powers they would ostensibly deny: "[I]ts cubes and angles seem a sort of incantation, a symbol for the forces that brought on this world calamity" (53). H.D. here elaborates that "masculomaniac" obsession, in John Cournos's words, laying the linguistic and imagistic ground of war ("Futurism" 6). Both H.D. and Cournos in their response to the avant-garde clearly recognize "the subterranean collusion of modernism with the myth of modernization," the paradoxical alliance of antiphilistine art with mechanical and material progress (Huyssen 56).

Recent critics of literary modernism would also see the relevance of Blake's remarks in assessing the turbulence of the first decades of the twentieth century. Modernist fictions, Frank Kermode suggests, "were related to others, which helped to shape the disastrous history of our time. Fictions . . . turn easily into myths; people will live by that which was designed only to know by" (112). Although conservative in character, Jeffrey Perl suggests, "classicism, in whatever guise, has been extraordinarily destabilizing as a cultural ideology" (10). As the implicit motive of modern classicism Perl points to the ideology of return to "authentic" cultural ground, whose paradigm is the homecoming of Odysseus. The modern imagines itself as classical, positing a need to return to what has been lost (20). But Perl recalls the violent potential within gestures of reclamation. To return to an imagined order "requires a certain amount of social engineering: nostalgia, throughout the poem [Homer's *Odyssey*], is equivalent to slaughtering Penelope's suitors" (256). This desire for political purification is the sting in the classic tale; and, as recent critics have suggested, such a desire is not unrelated to the fact that many modernist figures came to espouse authoritarian political ideals.[2]

Friedrich Nietzsche served as a progenitor of modern classicism when in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1877) he articulated his "faith in a yet-impending rebirth of Hellenic antiquity" (123). Ironically, as he later recalls in a preface, he wrote this exuberant early prophecy in the context of war, the dramatic excitement of which, he implies, leads one to muse upon the Greeks (17). German victory in the Franco-Prussian War, Nietzsche states, should serve as preparation for a cultural purgation of "everything Romanic," leading to a re-creation of the great tragic age of the Greeks (138–9).

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