

5-20-2012

H. D., Epistolary Poet: Bridging "Schism[s] in Consciousness" in Trilogy

Julia Grace Feerrar
Dickinson College

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholar.dickinson.edu/student_honors



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Feerrar, Julia Grace, "H. D., Epistolary Poet: Bridging "Schism[s] in Consciousness" in Trilogy" (2012). *Dickinson College Honors Theses*. Paper 38.

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Dickinson Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact scholar@dickinson.edu.

H.D., Epistolary Poet:
Bridging “Schism[s] in Consciousness” in *Trilogy*

Julia Feerrar

April 20, 2012

Professor K. Wendy Moffat

Acknowledgements

“Grateful thanks & all, all blessings” -H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson¹

Throughout her correspondence with Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D. makes her deep gratitude to him explicit. She thanks him repeatedly for his guidance and for his understanding of and belief in her work. She expresses her gratitude for his friendship. Following H.D.’s example, I would like to thank the many who, through their encouragement, input, and friendship, have supported this project.

I thank Holly Bowers, Genevieve Olson, Tyler Rosá and the rest of Professor Moffat’s 403/404 seminar for their thoughtful feedback, humor, and camaraderie. I had the honor of sharing this experience with incredibly smart, caring people. My gratitude to Professor Wendy Moffat, who once told me during English 220, “If you feel like you’re out on the tightrope and it’s shaking, that’s good. That’s where life is.” Her counsel has pushed me out onto the tightrope more times than I can count. She has urged me to think and act boldly and I am beyond grateful for her steady encouragement throughout this and so many other ventures.

Many thanks, also, to Professors Claire Bowen and Siobhan Phillips, who gave to me so generously of their time, thoughts, and bookshelves. Professor Bowen assigned the project that sent me to the library the day I first encountered H.D. And Professor Phillips introduced me to epistolary theory when I was studying the role of letters within Jane Austen’s fiction a year ago—even before Professor Phillips officially began her time at Dickinson. I thank both Professor Bowen and Professor Phillips for their guidance and enthusiasm before, during, and after my time in their classes.

During this project I have drawn on the support of multiple academic ‘homes.’ Nancy Kuhl and the staff at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library allowed me access to the H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson archives. I am grateful for their help and hospitality. I also acknowledge many anonymous inter-library loan librarians in the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, on whose work I have depended so many times. My coworkers in the Norman M. Eberly Writing Center provided encouragement, comic relief, and necessary distraction. I would like to thank Sarah Blumenstock and Megan Liberty particularly for their support and for reading later drafts of this paper. Thanks to Katie Dollard, Danielle Kelly, and so many other friends for standing by me and keeping me sane.

My gratitude to those whose support began long before I ever imagined this project. To Bonnie Hodgell and Meg Walker, who first taught me to think and write critically about literature. To my parents, Joy and Phil Feerrar, for always encouraging me to do what I love and for providing me with the means to do so. Thanks, especially, for the thousands of pages read aloud during my childhood.

And finally, such “grateful thanks” to Jessica Hassinger, Kallie Strode, Annalisa Synnestvedt, and Charity Warwick, my own correspondents. Their thoughtful writing inspired so many of my interests in letters and one of the greatest joys of this project has been sharing my love of correspondence with them.

¹ Doolittle, Hilda. Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, 14 Sept. 1959. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 245. Print.

Contents

Introduction: H.D.'s Fight For Breath	1
Chapter 1: Epistolary Friendship and Poetic Voice	8
Chapter 2: The Writer in Time and Place	20
Chapter 3: Responsibility and Dialogic Expectation	32
Coda: The Problem of Audience and the Art of 'Being on the Same Page'	44
Works Cited and Consulted	47

[10]

But we fight for life,
we fight, they say, for breath,

so what good are your scribblings?
this—we take them with us

beyond death; Mercury, Hermes, Thoth
invented the script, letters, palette;

the indicated flute or lyre-notes
on papyrus or parchment

are magic, indelibly stamped
on the atmosphere somewhere,

forever; remember, O Sword,
you are the younger brother, the latter-born,

your Triumph, however exultant,
must one day be over,

*in the beginning
was the Word.*

-H.D., *The Walls Do Not Fall*

Introduction: H.D.'s Fight For Breath

Who is H.D.? I wondered, standing upstairs in the Waidner-Spahr library, an anthology of 20th-century poetry in my hands. I did not recall hearing about this poet in any of my classes on modern literature and the letters H and D gave me no indication of gender, nationality, or generation. All I knew was that this poetry—*The Walls Do Not Fall*—and its bold assertions about the vitality of language and poetry fascinated me. “So what good are your scribblings?” the speaker’s implied audience asks, questioning the use and power of written language (H.D. *Walls* 10.3).² In response, the speaker argues that “scribblings,” or poetry specifically, has power that surpasses death (*Walls* 10.4-5). The speaker describes the struggle to write and to share writing as a fight for breath—a struggle that reflects anxiety about the poet’s role in the modern world: What are the responsibilities of the poet? Does poetry have value? What are its uses?

A project for a class on mid-20th century literature had brought me to the library on the day I first encountered H.D.’s poetry. I was intrigued and made a mental note to myself to complete follow-up research. I would later discover that H.D. is Hilda Doolittle, a major modernist writer born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania who spent most of her life abroad in London and Switzerland (Guest 3-5; Robinson xiii-3). The poem I first read is the tenth section of H.D.’s long poem, *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), the first in her *Trilogy*: three poems written during the Second World War. Her published writing spans five decades (1911-1961) and a variety of genres, sharing a moment in literary history with the overshadowing male figures of literary modernism: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and D.H. Lawrence. Feminist scholars like Alicia Ostriker (1983) and Susan Gubar (1989) align H.D. with these writers,

² H.D.’s *Trilogy* includes three long poems: *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*. Each of these long poems consists of 43 sections. In each citation of H.D.’s *Trilogy* I include a shortened version of the title (*Walls*, *Tribute*, or *Flowering*) and section number, followed by a period and line numbers.

arguing for her place in the modernist canon. (Friedman “Who Buried H.D.?” 46). *Why hadn't I heard of her?*

The “fight...for breath” introduced in *The Walls Do Not Fall* reflects and even anticipates a tradition of exclusion and misreading in H.D.’s reception. Just as an anonymous “you” or “they” questions the importance of poetry and threatens to silence the speaker, H.D.’s critics have questioned the relevance of her poetry and its place within the canon. Writing in 1975, over thirty years after H.D. published *The Walls Do Not Fall*, Susan Stanford Friedman explores the problem of H.D.’s anonymity. In her essay, “Who Buried H.D.?: A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in ‘The Literary Tradition,’” Friedman asserts that H.D. had still not received the critical attention she deserved, arguing that the canon had excluded her largely because she is a woman (46). Since Friedman first began her study of H.D., second wave feminism has done tremendous work to validate H.D.’s writing, reintroducing it into the canon; feminist scholars like Ostriker and Gubar, as well as Adalaide Morris (1984), Diana Collecott (1985), and more recently Helen V. Emmitt (2012), have carved a place for H.D. as a major modernist writer. With the opening of the H.D. archives at Yale, and posthumous publications of some of her writing, feminist scholars have continued to recognize the depth and breadth of her oeuvre. However, as Miranda B. Hickman asserts in “‘Uncanonically Seated’: H.D. and Literary Canons,” (2010) critical understanding of H.D.’s place within the canon is still “frail” and “haunted” (12). Negative reviews and critical misconceptions still “haunt” her current canonization. H.D.’s absence from my own understanding of 20th-century poetry reflects the vestiges of her pre-1970s exclusion from the canon as well as a series of gaps that still remain in her scholarship.

The depth and breadth of H.D.’s writing has lent itself to a variety of interpretations. In this paper I will explore three major readings or modes of reading within the history of her

reception: the recuperation and championing of her work within feminist scholarship; criticism of her poetry as elitist, inaccessible, and separate from the time in which she wrote; and the struggle within much of her criticism to make sense of her linguistically focused poetics. Studying *Trilogy* as a locus for these three conceptions, I argue that each of these readings demonstrates a gap—a negative space that misses an interaction or dialogue—between H.D.’s life and art, her poetry and her cultural moment, her writing and her readers. While feminist critics have done important work in legitimizing and deeply exploring H.D.’s writing, their gynocentric focus overlooks the importance of H.D.’s friend and literary advisor Norman Holmes Pearson. After they met in 1937, H.D. and Pearson began a written correspondence that would last for the next 24 years, until H.D.’s death in 1961. H.D. and Pearson exchanged over a thousand letters, in which they discuss her writing process and publication, share information about mutual friends and acquaintances, and provide solace to each other in times of great hardship (Hollenberg xi, 4).

Pearson’s friendship was vital to H.D.’s life and writing; he championed her work and asserted its relevance to mid-century culture. Yet, Donna Krolik Hollenberg’s edition of their letters, *Between History and Poetry*, is the only scholarly work to examine their relationship. Hollenberg’s edition, which she published in 1997, focuses on the letters that address H.D.’s writing process; Hollenberg argues that Pearson’s friendship was fundamental to H.D.’s development as a writer. I build on Hollenberg’s work to put their correspondence in dialogue with the poetry Pearson influenced and defended.

Unlike Pearson, many of H.D.’s first readers understood her as inaccessible and distanced from ‘real life.’ Even H.D.’s later critics have avoided classifying her as a war poet, because

much of the subject matter of her wartime poetry does not relate directly to combat.³ Yet, Second World War London is present throughout *Trilogy* in H.D.'s use of dates and her depiction of the wreckage of the Blitz. Anxiety regarding H.D.'s status as a war poet and as distanced from her time stems from the complexity of her poetics, which highlights the multiple meanings and consequent instability of the written word. Some critics, such as Scott Boehnen in his essay "'H. D., War Poet' and the 'Language Fantasy' of *Trilogy*," or Susan Gubar in "The Echoing Spell of H. D.'s *Trilogy*" understand H.D.'s play with words as the creation of a mystical vision of language, which then further dislocates her from the time in which she wrote as well as from her readers.

I aim to "fight for life...for breath," opening a space for the voice of the poet within the dialogue of her own reception through an examination of the interplay between *Trilogy* and her correspondence with Pearson. To do so, I turn to the archives. Pearson carefully compiled H.D.'s papers and bequeathed them to Yale for future study. Almost a year after I first discovered H.D.'s poetry, I had the honor of 'meeting' her in a new way when I gained access to her papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale. Holding her letters and Pearson's in my hands, I imagined myself reading over their shoulders as they too read and wrote. In a sense H.D.'s letters stood in for her; as Janet Gurkin Altman explains, the letter becomes a metonym, standing in for its writer "by virtue of physical contact" (19). The physical contact, or rather the holding of letters, draws attention to the humanity of their creators—their untidy handwriting, their misspellings, and above all the relationships their content attempts to embody and express. While *Between History and Poetry* offers incredible insight into H.D. and Pearson's friendship through Hollenberg's careful selection and annotations, it cannot replicate the materiality of the

³ Scott Boehnen and Sarah H.S. Graham both explain that critical response to H.D.'s work often moves away from defining her as a war poet (Boehnen 181; Graham 161).

letters nor can it include every letter. During my visit to the Beinecke I attempted to fill the gaps that editing inevitably leaves by focusing on letters yet unpublished.⁴

In my turn to archival work I bring the materials we often treat as ancillary texts into primary study, reading letters as literature. I study H.D. as an epistolary poet: a poet whose letter-writing influences her poetry and whose poetry demonstrates an epistolary awareness. *Trilogy* and the H.D.-Pearson correspondence share three stylistic features of epistolarity: reliance on friendship and personal connection, attention to time and place, and expectation of an intellectual and emotional response from the reader. Each of these features responds to a sense of fragmentation or separation. On the epistolary level, this is a separation between H.D. and Pearson as letter writers; correspondents write because they are physically distant from each other. The connection and intimacy between H.D. and Pearson in their letters reflects a dialogic⁵ sensibility in *Trilogy* that focuses on the power of personal connection and the value of multiple voices and collaboration in writing. For H.D., personal connection is vital to writing and in a sense *Trilogy* corresponds with Pearson himself.

For H.D. and Pearson, fragmentation is psychological and cultural as well as epistolary. As Judith Herman explains in *Trauma and Recovery*, traumatic events such as war cause fractures in an individual's sense of self, in his or her relationship with others, and in the bonds between the individual and community (214). Responding to the psychological disruption of war, H.D.'s writing (in both *Trilogy* and letters) features central concerns about the cultural sense of fragmentation in wartime England. This fragmentation is physical, describing the architectural destruction of London, as well as psychological or emotional. The separation between individual

⁴ In my parenthetical citations of H.D. and Pearson's correspondence I include page numbers for the letters that appear in Hollenberg's edition. Citations without a page number refer to unpublished letters housed at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven, CT.

⁵ I use the term "dialogic" as defined by M.M. Bakhtin in his essay, "Discourse in the Novel." Bakhtin writes that any prose discourse is oriented as a response to that which has come before it (279).

and community that Herman describes impels H.D. to write in an attempt to connect with her readers, evident in her attention to setting. The H.D.-Pearson correspondence shares with *Trilogy* a keen awareness of time and place. Both draw attention to the setting in which they were written through the inclusion of dates, location, and descriptions of current events. Through this awareness H.D. enters into a dialogue with her cultural moment, attempting to connect to the time and place from which she wrote. Letters and poetry then become a way to bridge over the fragmentation that war creates.

Throughout these modes of personal and cultural correspondence, H.D. writes with an expectation for a response. Her correspondence fosters a friendship with Pearson because they respond to each other in an ongoing cycle. Their friendship allows them to use language and allusions in a manner that outside readers may not understand and they can assess their mutual understanding through their responses. As she does in her letters, H.D. incorporates difficult allusions and language throughout *Trilogy*. H.D. expects her readers to be familiar with multiple languages, etymologies, and ancient myths—or to be willing to familiarize themselves. She invites readers into a dialogue with her poetry, expecting an intellectual and emotional engagement with her difficult poetics. Through active reading, H.D.'s audience can join in the discovery or creation of meaning in *Trilogy*, bridging another level of fragmentation.

The epistolary, psychological, and cultural fracturing I have addressed within these three stylistic features of epistolarity actually reflect what I have described as gaps in H.D.'s reception. These gaps contribute to her classification as a disconnected poet: isolated from personal relationships, separated from her cultural moment, and too difficult for many readers to access. I argue that reading H.D. as an epistolary poet allows a bridging. Her letters and poetry attempt to overcome fragmentation—to bridge gaps—through personal relationships and through a

connection to both current events and history in the face of war trauma. Reading H.D. as an epistolary poet reveals her as a *connected* poet—one who relies on the collaboration of her friend Norman Holmes Pearson, attempts to correspond with her contemporaries through her art, and invites readers into a dialogue with her work. *Trilogy* welcomes an active reading, meaning that readers must be willing to research, think, and puzzle out as if entering into an intellectual discourse. Understanding H.D. as an epistolary poet, which depends on reading correspondence as a legitimate art form, then leads to an understanding of her art itself as correspondence with her contemporary and future readers.

Chapter 1: Epistolary Friendship and Poetic Voice

but my mind (yours)
has its peculiar ego-centric

personal approach
to the eternal realities (*Walls* 38.19-22)

In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson dated April 25, 1958 H.D. writes, “This is to thank you. For all the special understanding. I can’t write of that now—but you must surely *feel* it” (“to Pearson 30 April 1958” 222). When H.D. references the “special understanding” she shares with Pearson she describes an intimacy or ‘meeting of minds’ she has felt and appreciated deeply for the previous two decades. H.D. and Pearson met in 1937 in New York City where she, a 51 year-old expatriate writer, was on a rare visit to the States from London (Hollenberg 2). Pearson, a Yale graduate student (23 years H.D.’s junior) had been sent to interview H.D. for the *Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, which he was co-editing with William Rose Benét (Hollenberg 2).⁶ After connecting during their first meeting H.D. and Pearson began a friendship and professional partnership that would last through the Second World War and into the early 1960s.

While H.D. scholars often acknowledge Pearson’s role as H.D.’s literary executor, most have missed the deeper significance of Pearson’s connection to her life and work. H.D. welcomes Pearson’s artistic and editorial input throughout their letters. *Trilogy* in turn reflects the ways in which H.D. connects and collaborates with Pearson in the dialogue of their letters in its incorporation of multiple voices and emphasis on the value of connection. The dialogic orientation of *Trilogy* towards a poetics of collaboration and personal relationship establishes the necessity of reading H.D. as an epistolary poet. Without her letters, we miss H.D.’s friendship

⁶ Benét planned the anthology as an act of canon formation that would showcase contemporary American writers and bring them into academia; H.D., a friend of Benét, was pleased to be included (Hollenberg 2).

with Pearson and her need for his involvement in her work. By seeking Pearson's help and acknowledging it within *Trilogy* H.D. challenges conceptions of an isolated, single-voiced writer. H.D. gives her poetry an essentially epistolary attention toward connection and discourse, indicating her need for the kind of personal connection that a reader like Pearson provides. H.D.'s relationship with Pearson frames her broader interest in connecting with readers as if corresponding with them through her poetry.

In her first letter to Pearson H.D. contends with a criticism of poets as disconnected from life and from personal relationships. She refutes the idea of the "inner world of imagination, the ivory tower, where poets presumably do live" ("to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937" 8). The line of thinking that H.D. acknowledges here refuses to imagine the biographical or cultural influences on a poet. As cultural critic Margaretta Jolly suggests in "Letters as / Not a Genre," some readers tend toward "celebrating genius in isolation" (102). However, H.D. and Pearson's correspondence demonstrates the weight of his influence on H.D.'s later career and, as I will argue later in this chapter, the primacy of epistolary *friendship* for H.D.'s writing. I do not suggest that H.D. stole Pearson's ideas or took advantage of him in order to write her poetry. Rather, that *Trilogy* itself is part of the dialogue I examine in H.D. and Pearson's correspondence. On May 15, 1943 H.D. writes to Pearson of the importance of their letters: "Dear Norman, I who don't write letters much (unlike Br[yher])⁷ must write you because there is a sort of 'brook and river meet' feeling and I am afraid to let it lapse—I mean I really AM, for the first time in my long life (56 remember) trying to READ my own books, at least make a list of them..." ("to Pearson 15 May 1943" 24-25).⁸ H.D. describes the connection she feels with

⁷ Bryher, born Annie Winifred Allerman, met H.D. in 1918. They were involved in a lifelong, open romantic relationship, both taking other partners (male and female) at different times (Hollenberg 11).

⁸ H.D. did, of course, write many letters. I read her assertion as a modest attempt to highlight just how important writing to Pearson is for her.

Pearson as a ‘brook and river meet,’ drawing attention to their special understanding.

Corresponding with him is vital—she “must” write to him—because through her letters she is able to organize her writing and process it.

When H.D. reflects that she is processing her writing “for the first time,” she draws attention to the timeliness of the beginning of her correspondence with Pearson, which coincides with the start of one of the most productive periods of her career. When she met Pearson in 1937 H.D. was an established writer. She was known for her role in the Imagist movement, which involved poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Amy Lowell and focused on clear expression and precise visual images. Her five published volumes of poetry, including *Collected Poems* (1925) and most recently *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931), as well as a verse drama and multiple works of fiction had established her in what Susan Stanford Friedman describes as the “public domain of literature” (*Psyche Reborn* 7). But during the 1930s H.D. reached an “aesthetic dead end,” writing and publishing very little (Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 7).⁹ During the early years of her correspondence with Pearson, the “brook and river” feeling she describes in her letter aided H.D. in breaking what had been a silence in her writing with the publication of *Trilogy*, composed of three long poems: *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946). H.D.’s and Pearson’s letters demonstrate the importance of Pearson’s role as motivator, confidant, and advisor on H.D.’s productive writing period during and after the Second World War.

Initially, H.D. did not plan to write a three-part war epic. As she wrote *Tribute to the Angles*, however, Pearson encouraged her to continue writing and reinforced the relevance of her

⁹ During the 1930s H.D. moved to Vienna to be analyzed by Freud. During her stay in Vienna H.D. wrote letters to Bryher and other friends, giving insight into her experiences there (*Analyzing Freud* xvii). Friedman studies these letters and H.D.’s relationship with Freud in *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle*. She argues that H.D.’s time with Freud sparked her writing in the early 40s (*Analyzing Freud* xvii). While H.D.’s letters from the 1930s would enlighten a reading of the poetry that followed them, they are outside of the scope of this paper.

work. Pearson first suggested that H.D. conceive of her work as a trilogy with three “sets” after reading her manuscript for *Tribute* (“to H.D. 31 Aug. 1944” 42). H.D.’s response to Pearson’s letter suggesting that she write what would become *The Flowering of the Rod* demonstrates how much she values his ideas:

Thank you for your last letter—and for having read the Angel series. I want myself to “do” something about it—either write a slight introduction or as you say leave it, and do a third to the trilogy...Then if I do a third, it should be dedicated to Norman Holmes Pearson, don’t you think???? But I haven’t the foggiest idea what the 3rd is to be about...Have you any inspirational ideas???? (“to Pearson 11 Sep. 1944” 43)

H.D. thanks Pearson for reading her work and considers his suggestions.¹⁰ Her enthusiastic use of question marks indicates the depth of her gratitude and her eagerness for more advice. She plans to dedicate her third poem to Pearson and asks very dramatically for any ideas he might have, thereby encouraging him to participate in her poetry, presenting it as something they share. Later, after beginning to write *The Flowering of the Rod*, H.D. refers to her poem as “our *Rod*,” further indicating that she shares it with Pearson (“to Pearson 29 July 1945” 46).

As she plans in this letter, H.D. does dedicate *The Flowering of the Rod* to Pearson and any edition of *Trilogy* includes this public confirmation of her gratitude to him. Reading more closely, readers will find that Pearson owns the copyright to H.D.’s poetry. And further, the first edition of *Trilogy* in 1973 includes a Foreword by Pearson, in which he quotes extensively from H.D.’s letters. Despite these literal cues to Pearson’s importance for H.D.’s work, her scholarship is notably silent on his influence. While biographers like Susan Stanford Friedman (1981), Janice

¹⁰ H.D. wrote the “third set” Pearson suggested and began to refer to the poems together as *Trilogy*, but did not publish *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod* together. *Trilogy* did not appear as a single volume until Pearson published it in 1973, long after H.D.’s death in 1961.

S. Robinson (1982), and Barbara Guest (1984) acknowledge Pearson's role as a supporter of H.D.'s work, he only inhabits a few pages of their narratives. For example, Robinson mentions Pearson in passing as H.D.'s literary executor, but never examines their relationship. H.D.'s earliest critics were probably unaware of Pearson's significance in her life and work because most of their correspondence was not available to scholars until after Pearson's death in 1975. In her Preface to *Psyche Reborn* Friedman writes that she was unable to access H.D.'s letters to or from Bryher, Pearson, or Richard Aldington¹¹ during her research at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in 1980 (xiii). But even when Pearson's letters became available, he still received little attention.

I believe that Pearson's absence in H.D. scholarship demonstrates an unwillingness to recognize a positive male influence on her writing. Much of H.D.'s scholarship has focused on her relationships with troublesome male mentors. In her unpublished journal, "Compassionate Friendship," (1955) H.D. lists seven men whom she calls her "initiators": Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, John Cournos, D.H. Lawrence, Cecil Gray, Kenneth Macpherson, Walter Schmideberg, and Erich Heydt (qtd. in Hollenberg 3). Many of these men were "agents of destruction" for H.D., a phrase she uses to describe Cournos (qtd. in Hollenberg 3). These men were former friends and lovers, fellow artists and psychoanalysts whose role elicits her ambivalence (qtd. in Hollenberg 3, Guest xi). Pound, for example, was engaged to H.D. from 1905 to 1908 (Robinson 11). Although her relationship with Pound sparked the beginning of her career as a poet, it also dominated and stifled H.D. He asserted authority over her writing and separated her from family and friends (Robinson 16).¹² Feminist scholars have worked to

¹¹ Richard Aldington, a British poet, married H.D. in 1913 (Friedman *Psyche* 1). They separated in 1919 and finally divorced much later.

¹² See Rachel Blau DuPlessis' "Romantic Thralldom in H.D." (1979) for further explication of H.D.'s relationships with men.

extricate H.D. from the authority of her “initiators” and so seem hesitant to understand her relationship with Pearson as dynamic and essential.

Barbara Guest would include Pearson on H.D.’s list of “initiators.” Guest writes that Pearson, motivated by his need for power, “schemed and maneuvered” in order to build Yale’s collection of contemporary American literature beyond any other university (267). Guest describes Pearson’s relationship with H.D. as “mystifying” (267). She writes, “He did everything he could, without faltering, to further her career. It may have been that, in his fashion, he was in love with her, as certain of his letters to her exhibit a kind of adulation and regard, as if she were an extraordinary person to both him and to the world” (Guest 267). Guest’s analysis is puzzling and unfair. She assumes that Pearson’s loyalty to H.D. must be explained only by romantic love or a desire for power. By polarizing their relationship, Guest discounts Pearson’s “regard” for H.D., unwilling to see it as the honest admiration and friendship I will explore further. Guest’s accusations dramatize a hesitance in H.D.’s feminist criticism to understand any male influence as positive.

Attempting to disprove the presence of romantic feelings between H.D. and Pearson would be impossible and irrelevant to my aims in this paper. Despite Guest’s presumptions, the fact that Pearson does not appear on H.D.’s list indicates that H.D. thought of him differently from her “initiators.” I argue that Pearson’s gender does not signify in his role as correspondent and collaborator. As Hollenberg explains, eventually Pearson was the only person H.D. consistently allowed “into the workshop of her creative process” (Hollenberg 4). On August 9, 1943, she sent him a manuscript copy of *The Gift*, a memoir of her early life in Pennsylvania. She writes:

I usually destroy originals but find I have my first rough typed copy (I work direct on machine) and would be glad to hand it over to you for your collection, later, if you want it...I will do the fresh one if you bring me this on my return, but it occurred to me this morning that you might understand a few things in it, as hardly anyone can or will. ("to Pearson 9 Aug. 1943" 26)

By 1943 Pearson had already begun to collect drafts of H.D.'s writing, planning to preserve them safely at Yale. H.D. offers to give Pearson her original typescript of *The Gift* for his "collection," indicating her trust in his archiving. H.D. also trusts Pearson's opinion on the content of her work, explaining that he understands it better than anyone else. Pearson, in turn, recognizes and appreciates H.D.'s confidence: "*The Gift* was a gift which I shall cherish and am cherishing. I am in it now, and hugely satisfied with it. Of course I should like the first rough draft if you still have it" ("to H.D. 25 Aug. 1943" 27). His enthusiasm for her writing and for his role as friend-advisor comes through in his language: he is "cherishing" and "hugely satisfied." Both H.D. and Pearson appreciate the collaborative relationship that their letters foster; their letters allow them to work together on H.D.'s writing, but also to connect as friends.

The personal nature of H.D.'s and Pearson's letters further subverts the isolated poet image. In her article on editing the H.D.-Pearson correspondence, co-written with Yale librarian Louis Silverstein, Donna Hollenberg explains her reasons for including Pearson's letters in her volume: "First, despite Pearson's lesser fame, we will include both sides of the correspondence, a decision which challenges certain romantic ideas about the solitary nature of creativity by acknowledging the importance of dialogue in an artist's development" (Hollenberg and Silverstein 19). As Hollenberg argues, the letters paint H.D. as an artist who depends on friendship as a catalyst for creativity. H.D. and Pearson's dialogue through letters demonstrates

their mutual trust, affection, and intellectual interests as well as the significance of Pearson's influence on H.D.'s writing and publication.

Hollenberg's description of the H.D.-Pearson correspondence as a "dialogue" emphasizes that the friendship fostered in their letters forms through an exchange. A written correspondence requires at least two participants: a sender who writes the letter and a recipient who receives it and then responds. Pearson describes this exchange between writer and recipient as a dialogue when he writes to H.D. in August of 1946, after a lapse in their writing: "I have thought of you so often, wanted to talk with you by letter" ("to H.D. 28 Aug. 1946"). In order to further explore the nature of H.D.'s and Pearson's epistolary relationship and the implications for its definition as a dialogue, I use as a critical lens the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who conceives of communication as dialogic. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin asserts:

...every extra-artistic prose discourse—in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly—cannot fail to be oriented toward the "already uttered," the "already known," the "common opinion" and so forth. The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse. (279)

According to Bakhtin, written discourse is dialogic because it is always oriented to that which has preceded it, which he describes as the "already uttered." A novel, Bakhtin's primary interest, *responds* to and incorporates various social discourses and, by extension, anticipates the discourse that will follow (278). Though Bakhtin limits his study of the "dialogic orientation of discourse" to novels, his theories are illuminating in a study of letters. Letters always respond to the "already uttered" and also imagine a future utterance. As Margaretta Jolly points out, letter writers repeatedly trade roles as sender and recipient, allowing for an exchange of information and equal sharing (94). Langdon Hammer, a scholar of Elizabeth Bishop's letters, describes the

reciprocity of letters as a “cycle of composition” (174). I would add that this exchange or cycle replicates a dialogue in an attempt to form a personal connection. Like friends speaking verbally, familiar correspondents such as H.D. and Pearson share personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, developing a more intimate relationship through writing. I describe this development of intimacy, which occurs through the reciprocal sharing of information, as *epistolary connection*.

H.D. and Pearson’s correspondence becomes increasingly personal as their epistolary connection, or “special understanding” develops through the dialogue of their letters (“to Pearson 30 April 1958” 222).¹³ Almost every letter or “utterance” within H.D. and Pearson’s correspondence begins and ends with a salutation and one can trace the progression of their relationship in these greetings. The formal, “Dear Norman Pearson” to whom H.D. writes in her first letter soon becomes “Dearest Norman” who in turn writes to “Dear Hilda” by November of 1938. The closings of their letters become increasingly affectionate as well. In 1941 H.D. closes many of her letters “from Hilda.” But by June of 1946 H.D. finishes a letter, “With love again and gratitude and thanks, ever affectionately, H.D.” (“to Pearson 11 June 1946” 56). In his article, “On the Edge of Literariness: The Writing of Letters,” Claudio Guillén argues that the most central concern of letters is the sharing of affection, friendship, or love. He writes, “this communication of feelings is most frequently the motor of the writing and its principal or more profound function,” (Guillén 9). Guillén’s focus on personal relationships as a “motor” or driving force points to the centrality of friendship to H.D. and Pearson’s correspondence. The

¹³ The content of their letters includes everything from news about mutual friends such as Ezra Pound, to serious reflections on H.D.’s writing, to family news. H.D. often asks after Pearson’s wife, Susan Bennet Pearson, and children, sending them love and Pearson becomes good friends with H.D.’s partner, Bryher, corresponding with her often. Pearson also developed a friendship with H.D.’s daughter, Perdita, after finding a job for her in Counter-Intelligence during the war (“to H.D. 9 July 1943”). When Perdita moved to the United States after the war they saw each other often, and Pearson later became the godfather of her son (“to H.D. 9 Nov. 1946”; “to H.D. 22 Feb. 1951”).

nature of this friendship, of course, is more than an expression of feelings—their correspondence also exchanges thoughts and ideas. Thought and feeling become intertwined in their letters, as do the personal and professional realms, allowing H.D. and Pearson's connection to frame H.D.'s poetry.

Whereas letters create a dialogic space for two writer-readers, a space that encourages or even necessitates sharing and collaboration, we most often think of poetry, particularly lyric poetry, as presenting a single voice. Writer and reader do not exchange roles so explicitly in poetry and so they do not correspond or connect in the same way they do in letters. Siobhan Phillips writes of this tendency to understand poetry as a closed system in her review of recent work by poets Julie Carr, Noelle Kocot, Ange Mlinko, and Jena Osman. Phillips writes, "What kinds of connection can poetry make? It's an unexpected question, perhaps, because verse has often been thought of as the genre of isolation or wholeness: a well-wrought urn stood in timeless completion, an overheard speaker murmuring of himself to himself" ("All Together Now"). Even if the speaker of a poem does not make his or her presence explicit with the singular personal "I," we imagine a lone speaker created by and often speaking on behalf of a single poet. H.D.'s *Trilogy* troubles conceptions of poetry as presenting a single poetic voice. H.D. plays with pronoun use throughout her poems, at times speaking with I, we, and you, and sometimes narrating with the third person.

At times H.D.'s pronoun use presents a pseudo-conversation between different we's, I's, and you's. Near the end of *The Walls Do Not Fall* the speaker gestures at a dialogue: "no comment can alter spiritual realities / (you say) or again" (38.5-6). Some unidentified "you" criticizes the speaker, arguing that her¹⁴ comments about myth and spirituality will make no

¹⁴ For the purpose of this paper I describe H.D.'s speaker as 'she.' Critics such as Susan Gubar and Adalaide Morris align the speaker with H.D. herself, particularly because the speaker is a scribe or poet figure. With the use of the

change to reality and history. In response to this criticism, the speaker attempts to connect with “you” by aligning their minds: “my mind (yours), / your way of thought (mine) / each has its peculiar intricate map,” (*Walls* 38.9-10). The speaker suggests that she and her addressed share the quality of having a unique mind and thus, her contribution through poetry is important. These lines reflect a certain sense of reciprocity and connection, which also feature in their couplet form. Couplets, which form the vast majority of *Trilogy*, include a gesture and response. For example, in one line H.D. writes, ““What is the jewel colour?”” and the second line in the couplet answers, “green-white, opalescent” (*Tribute* 13.1-2). While the speaker has to answer herself or imagine an answer, the gesture and response pattern demonstrates what I describe as a dialogic or even an epistolary consciousness, which also opens to the reader. The use of the second person involves the reader, even though he or she cannot answer directly within the poem. *Trilogy* is dialogically oriented in a manner comparable to Bakhtin’s theories and acknowledges the importance of personal connection even in form. Although they do not carry in them the room for a response that a correspondence might, they attempt to replicate its affect.

Like her correspondence with Pearson, the dialogic vision of connection H.D. presents in *Trilogy* does not depend on gender. For example, in section 13 of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the speaker describes herself as “surrounded by companions / in this mystery” (*Walls* 13.6-8). The speaker is not alone in her quest for meaning, which she references with the phrase “this mystery.” Like letter writers, whose primary identity is simply as a correspondent, the speaker’s “companions” are genderless. However, feminist critics often read H.D.’s poetry as female-centric, mirroring their wariness of male influence like Guest’s of Pearson. When Miranda B. Hickman identifies the problems in H.D.’s current status in the canon, she suggests that the

feminine pronoun I take a step back from drawing a direct relationship between H.D. and her poetic voice, while still allowing for a parallel.

feminist “recuperative climate” of H.D. scholarship constructs H.D. as “one whose writing is read as ‘gynocentric’ and whose sexuality is construed as ‘maternal,’” overlooking the “mutability and diversity” of H.D.’s writing (13). I agree with Hickman’s concern. Like the letters, *Trilogy* promotes connection and friendship, which as Hickman claims, involves a “gender-unspecific dynamic” (18). *Trilogy* offers a humanistic view of friendship not often identified in H.D. scholarship. I argue that her vision of relationships is epistolary: focused on exchange and connection, not on gender.

Reading H.D. as an epistolary poet demonstrates how vital private friendship and professional collaboration are for her writing process. The merging between private and professional or public realms in letters allows H.D. to draw connections between her life and art. She is not an isolated poet by any means. *Trilogy* then reflects a dialogic awareness similar to letters, returning us to Phillips’s question: “What connections can poetry make?” By framing her poetry with the stylistics of an epistolary friendship, H.D. sets a certain expectation for her relationship with readers. She aims to connect with her broader readership in a manner that reflects her epistolary friendship with Pearson. This connective writer-reader relationship becomes even more significant when we broaden our attention to the cultural context of H.D.’s writing: the Second World War.

Chapter 2: The Writer in Time and Place

chasm, schism in consciousness
must be bridged over;

.....
now is the time to re-value
our secret hoard

in light of both past and future, (*Walls* 36.5-11)

When the Second World War began in early September 1939, H.D. was in Switzerland with her partner Bryher. She returned to London as soon as she could after France and England declared war on Germany on September 3, and she spent most of the war there (Hollenberg 17). Complications from a childhood hip injury prevented Pearson from enlisting when the United States entered the war in 1942, but eventually he found a position with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Like H.D., he spent the rest of the war in London where they continued to exchange letters encouraging her to write her war *Trilogy* (Hollenberg 3, 19).

However, contemporary reviews often described *Trilogy* as obscure or inaccurate in relation to London during the Second World War, emphasizing its separation. In *The New Republic* Oscar Williams describes *The Walls Do Not Fall* as “a surprisingly good little book,” but one with less of the “vitality” and “awareness and sense of responsibility” of other poets of the forties (“Ladies’ Day”). Lawrence Alloday writes that H.D.’s poems “have missed the spirit of London during 1940” (“Durrant’s Press Cuttings”). Readers like Williams and Alloday claim that H.D. does not speak to the war, and further that she does not speak to the essence of her time.¹⁵ In doing so, they miss H.D.’s assertions of her position as a poet writing in London during the Second World War. Much like a familiar correspondence, *Trilogy* does address and respond to a specific time and place. H.D. makes her setting clear in her poetry through the

¹⁵ Exceptions include Louise Bogan. Writing in 1944, Bogan describes *The Walls Do Not Fall* as showing “tenser feeling, writing of more energy, and thought of a larger sweep” than H.D.’s previous poetry (Bogan *The New Yorker* Oct. 21, 1944).

incorporation of dates and place names, as well as descriptions of the physical destruction and emotional fragmentation of war. Reading H.D. as an epistolary poet, I argue that H.D.'s awareness of time and place in both her poetry and letters works to *connect* her writing with her audience and we can understand *Trilogy* itself as a form of cultural correspondence. Ultimately, H.D. demonstrates her interest in reconciling the “schism in consciousness” that war creates; she presents writing, both in letters and poetry, as a way to work through the cultural trauma of war (*Walls* 36.5-11).

A written correspondence requires a unique attention to geography and temporality. Like any correspondents, H.D. and Pearson acknowledge the physical distance between them at the beginning of almost every letter with the inclusion of a date and address. For example, when H.D. writes,

Flat 10

49 Lowdnes Square

London S.W. 1

August 9, Monday [1943]

at the top of her letter she emphasizes that she writes specifically from London during the Second World War. The war itself also haunts H.D. and Pearson's letters. In February of 1944 H.D. writes, “Was interrupted here...it has been bomb-bomb-bomb story all morning. I feel so dreadful—but can't do very much” (“to Pearson 24 Feb. 1944” 34). As she writes, bombing interrupts her, making her feel “dreadful” and powerless. But by constantly responding to and addressing a specific geographic and temporal setting, H.D. and Pearson attempt to deepen their epistolary connection. As readers, they can imagine where and when the other writes, and feel somehow closer to them through this imagination. Often, they help each other to imagine their

respective settings through description. On December 12, 1937 H.D. begins her correspondence with Pearson with a response to his request that she explain “why I wrote, when I wrote and how I wrote...for people who may not be altogether in sympathy with my sort of work” (“to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 8). Much of her first letter forms a defense for her own poetry and for poetry in general.¹⁶ The letter begins: “Dear Norman Pearson. Glancing at random, over the sheaf of poems you handed me, I fall on ‘Lethe’ and ‘Song’” (“to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 8). Like so many letter-writers, H.D. begins with a description of her present actions. H.D. brings her reader, Pearson, to her present moment, connecting him to her as if they glance over the poems together. Though her words cannot bring them together physically, H.D. writes with confidence that her attention to setting allows them to at least share an imagined space.

Like her letters, H.D.’s poetry both addresses and responds to a particular time and place from its beginning. *The Walls Do Not Fall* opens with H.D.’s dedication, which appears adjacent to the title page, revealing that she writes “*from London 1942*” during the Second World War and more specifically, the Blitz.¹⁷ Already, H.D. asserts her proximity to the war. The other two poems in *Trilogy* close with the dates of their composition: *Tribute to the Angels* finishes with “London / May 17-31, 1944” and *The Flowering of the Rod* finishes with “London / December 18-31, 1944” (43.27-28; 43.9-10). In her article, “‘We Have a Secret. We are Alive’: H.D.’s *Trilogy* as Response to War,” Sarah S. Graham describes the two later dates as a survivor’s badge, demonstrating that H.D. has not attempted to escape the dangers of wartime London (161). H.D.’s inclusion of dates also demonstrates how quickly she wrote (Graham 161).

¹⁶ Later Pearson edited this letter, titled it “A Note On Poetry” and added it to his anthology.

¹⁷ During the London Blitz, a period of intense bombing in London from September 1940 to May 1941, more than 20,000 people died and over 140,000,000 were made homeless (“Remembering the Blitz”). Aerial warfare brought combat directly to British civilians, making the home front unsafe and creating a new sense of threat from above. A “sputter” of bombing followed after the initial Blitz of 1940-41, adding another 30,000 deaths in the next three years (“London Re-Blitz”).

According to Graham, “this is the poet as war correspondent, reporting back from the civilian front line” (162). Graham’s claim defines poetry as a mode of communication that depicts civilian experience. H.D. positions herself as someone able to share experience of the “front line,” corresponding with her readers as if through a letter.

In letters, the attention to setting promotes a connection between the writer and reader. An epistolary connection like H.D.’s and Pearson’s constantly works through or against a sense of fragmentation or separation; correspondents write because they are physically absent from each other. Janet Altman, who examines the role of the letter as a connecting agent in her seminal work, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, describes the role of letters as a bridge between sender and receiver (Altman 13). Grounding her theories in a study of early French novels, she explains that writers of epistolary fiction can choose whether to emphasize the “bridge,” the closeness and intimacy of a letter, or the “gap,” the separation and disconnection they attempt to overcome (Altman 13). In other words, letters highlight *both* the connection and separation of their writers and readers.

Though Altman studies epistolary fiction—novels consisting of fictional letters—her theories apply to H.D. and Pearson, who use remarkably similar terms to describe their writing. Pearson defines their correspondence as a bridge, asking H.D. “what other gaps” he can help to close, and joyfully expressing that “the bridges are being crossed again” when he and H.D. begin writing more often in 1948 (“to H.D. 20 Jan. 1946,” “to H.D. 20 July 1948”). In May of 1943 H.D. refers to her letter writing as a “mad effort to bridge the gap in years and oceans” (“to Pearson 15 May 1943” 25). She is very aware of the distance between herself and her correspondents, a distance that is both temporal and physical. Her language indicates the urgency

of letter writing as a “mad effort” or furious attempt at connecting across emotional and physical distance. For H.D. and Pearson, letter writing is a vital and successful act of bridging.

Yet, while H.D. seems confident in the ability of her letters bridge the gap between Pearson and herself, she recognizes that her poetry may not work as a perfect bridge to her readers. Her emphasis on date and time in her framing of *Trilogy* indicates her desire to replicate the epistolary writer-reader connection in her poetry. Although H.D.’s first letter opens with her attempts to connect to Pearson and to contextualize her poetry, much of the letter reveals H.D.’s anxieties about connecting her poetry to readers and to her world. H.D. describes her poems in fragmentary language, referring to them as “these fragments,” “finished fragments,” and “stylistic slashings” (“to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 8, 10). Her identification of her poetry as possibly fragmented and disconnected emphasizes her concerns about its isolation. As H.D. explains to Pearson, readers have criticized her for being out of touch with current events, for living in the poet’s “ivory tower” (“to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 8). H.D. takes on the voice of her critics when she writes, “We don’t live. We don’t see life. And so on” (“to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 9). By positing that poets do not “see” life, her readers view writers as disconnected, isolated, and irrelevant. However, H.D.’s readers expect her to relate and respond to the outer world. Her attention to time and place indicate that she shares this expectation and attempts to fulfill it. Why and how, then, do her readers miss her attempt at connection?

In *Trilogy*, H.D. addresses and responds to life in a setting whose true “spirit” becomes the subject for debate. When Lawrence Alloday asserts that H.D. fails to capture the “spirit of London” he most likely references a sense of stoicism, confidence, and unity. Traditionally, the Blitz signifies the enduring British spirit. However, in *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991) historian Angus Calder explains that morale in London during the Second World War has been

mythologized since the beginning of the Blitz. He writes, “‘The Blitz’ supports a myth of British or English moral pre-eminence, buttressed by British unity” (2). As Calder asserts, conceptions of harmony and courage gloss over the violence and trauma of bombardment.

Trilogy does not subscribe to a unified or traditionally heroic perception of Blitz experience. Instead, *The Walls Do Not Fall* opens with images of separation and fragmentation. In the first section, the speaker takes the reader on a tour of destruction:

there, as here, ruin opens
 the tomb, the temple; enter,
 there as here, there are no doors:

 ...—we pass on
 to another cellar, to another sliced wall (*Walls* 1.10-12, 27-28)

The brevity of these lines reflects the fragmentation the speaker describes. Bombardment ruptures public and private dwelling places: the tombs, temples, and homes. When H.D.’s speaker characterizes destruction as both “here” and “there” she aligns the private or personal “here” experiences of destruction with a broader, collective “there.” As she continues to point “there” and “here,” the speaker draws attention to “another” cellar and sliced wall, indicating that these are only a sampling of the destruction we might witness (*Walls* 1.16, 28).

Language related to this sense of brokenness appears throughout *Trilogy*. The speaker describes the physical “ruin everywhere,” around her where “cities lie broken,” (*Walls* 1.18, *Flowering* 10.3). The speaker often describes a “chasm” or “schism in consciousness,” expressing both a personal and cultural feeling of rupture during wartime (*Walls* 40.9-12, 36.5-6). The words “splintered” and “shattered” also emerge throughout the poetry, reflecting

brokenness and vulnerability (*Walls* 21.30). The speaker presents a fractured picture of “the spirit” of the early 1940s. Readers like Williams and Alloday who look for unity and stoicism then reject this depiction, missing H.D.’s assertions of her position as a poet writing in London during the war.

The sense of fragmentation that H.D. describes from the beginning of *Trilogy* reflects a common response to trauma.¹⁸ *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) cites “feelings of detachment or estrangement from others” as a criterion for posttraumatic stress disorder (“DSM Criteria”). In *Trauma and Recovery* Judith Herman expands on this criterion when she describes a psychological sense of fractured-ness as a primary effect of trauma:

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. (Herman 51)

Herman argues that trauma creates detachment on a personal level and her language emphasizes the emotional destruction that trauma causes. A trauma like war has the power to “breach” or rupture connections between the self and others. It “shatters” or breaks down conceptions of self by isolating individuals. It “undermines” the things most central or “basic” to human experience: relationships. Concentrating on individual case studies, Herman describes the disconnection

¹⁸ Many scholars identify the preoccupation with fragmentation that H.D. exhibits as part of a larger pattern in early to mid-twentieth century literature and experience. John Tytell describes fragmentation as a hallmark of modernism in his essay, “Epiphany in Chaos: Fragmentation in Modernism” and Susan Stanford Friedman describes fragmentation as the “starting point” of modernism in *Psyche Reborn* (7-8). Leo Mellor explores fragmentation within the context of the Second World War specifically in *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites, and British Culture*. H.D.’s anxiety about fragmentation reflects a broader cultural experience with roots in Britain’s experience in the First World War, which then manifests most clearly in her writing from the Second World War.

resulting from trauma on an individual, personal level. However, her theories apply to a collective, cultural trauma as well. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs defines events such as bombings or war as “community violence,” which, like other traumas, often result in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for the individuals who experience them (Hamblen). The fragmentation Herman describes appears throughout H.D.’s letters and poetry. Drawing on Herman’s understanding of trauma and relationships I will continue to explore H.D.’s letters and poetry as an attempt to reconnect the writer with her readers who share in the trauma of her time and place.

In their letters during the Second World War, H.D. and Pearson identify the personal rupture Herman describes and attempt to overcome it.¹⁹ For example, in 1943 H.D. describes people in the following terms: “here one, here another, glued to their rocks, isolated or ‘insulated,’ as I said of myself the other evening” (“to Pearson 26 Aug. 1943” 28). H.D. characterizes people as separated, like islands or “rocks” far afield. She includes herself in this description, but then offers a call for connection between isolated people: “If two such transitional beings meet and can not clutch at each other across the abyss, then life ends, all life!” (“to Pearson 26 Aug. 1943” 28). H.D. suggests that insulated individuals draw together, ‘clutching’ one another “across the abyss” that war trauma creates. She highlights the importance of this drawing together by aligning its failure with death. As Herman argues, recovery from trauma must occur within the context of relationships (Herman 133). With these abstractions H.D. characterizes her relationship with Pearson. By sharing her anxieties about isolation, H.D. develops an intimacy with Pearson; the epistolary connection I described in the previous chapter

¹⁹ H.D. also identified a sense of fragmentation following The First World War. The War left H.D. feeling shattered. Her husband’s affair, the death of her brother and father, illness, and a problematic pregnancy further ruptured her feelings (Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 3). In her essay “H.D. by Delia Alton,” H.D. describes her psychological state and that of the members of her artistic circle between the wars: “Perhaps dispersion is the key word. We were dispersed and scattered after War I” (184).

takes on a new significance within the context of war because it offers an answer to fragmentation. When H.D. and Pearson share their experiences of trauma as correspondents, they bridge a gap between themselves. H.D. and Pearson trust that letters can cross the “abyss”: the psychological and even physical rift between people. For H.D., the personal relationship fostered *within letters*—not just the personal relationship itself—is essential for bridging the fragmentation of trauma.

H.D.’s use of fragmentation as a motif in *Trilogy* reflects the temporal and geographic gaps in letter writing; the gap or sense of distance impels H.D. to write. In *The Walls Do Not Fall* the speaker describes a “chasm, schism in consciousness” that “must be bridged over” (*Walls* 36.5-6). The poet must connect to her readers, offering a reprieve from the psychological “chasm” or gap in British culture. Though the single poetic voice does not enter a direct dialogue or correspondence with a reader, she still plays a connecting role through written language. H.D. describes her connective aims in her first letter to Pearson. She writes, “In order to speak adequately of my poetry and its aims, I must, you see, drag in a whole deracinated epoc[h]” (to Pearson 12 Dec. 1937” 10). H.D. claims that her own “deracinated” or uprooted era must provide the context for her poetry (“deracinated”). Her fragmented poetry, then, reflects and even speaks for her displaced era. Her use of fragmentary language, though recognizing the possible failure of her writing, draws a connection to the time and place of her poetry. Returning to Bakhtin’s theories, the “style” of H.D.’s poetry, “organically contains within itself indices that read outside itself, a correspondence of its own elements and the elements of an alien context” (284). The stylistic fragmentation of *Trilogy* corresponds with its fragmentary context. H.D. connects with her wartime readers by replicating and reconstructing the fragmentation that they too experience.

H.D.'s speaker in *Trilogy* responds to this sense of fragmentation by constantly searching for meaning and understanding, often through mythology and scripture. She synthesizes Greek and Egyptian mythology, and Judeo-Christian scripture, reframing the past in relation to observations of London during the Blitz. For example, in section 40 of *The Walls Do Not Fall* the speaker meditates on Osiris and then attempts to connect his myth to her world. In the Egyptian myth, Osiris's brother Set kills him and cuts him into fourteen pieces, which Set then buries throughout Egypt (Barnstone 179). After introducing Osiris, the speaker does not describe the myth explicitly, but instead explains her process of relating myth to the present:

plasterer, crude mason,
 not too well equipped, my thought would cover deplorable gaps
 in time, reveal the regrettable chasm,
 bridge that before-and-after schism, (*Walls* 40.54)

The speaker, who identifies as a writer or scribe throughout the poem, describes herself as a “plasterer, crude mason,” one who builds and connects, albeit messily. To the mythologist-mason the “deplorable gaps,” “chasm,” and “schism” are temporal as well as physical. The “before-and-after schism” indicates a disconnection between the past and present, as well as the present and future. The mason speaks through this fragmentation, “bridging over” or connecting through it. In doing so, the speaker explains that she wishes to “recover the secret of Isis” (*Walls* 40.19). According to Egyptian mythology, Osiris's sister-wife Isis sewed the fourteen pieces of his body together, bringing him back to life (Barnstone 179). If the speaker recovers the secret of Isis she succeeds in forming connections from a place of fragmentation. Here and throughout *Trilogy* she describes and navigates the role of the poet in wartime. Writing poetry is an attempt to bridge the schism, to “collect the fragments of the splintered glass” (*Tribute* 1.14).

However, for some readers the complexity of H.D.'s writing and use of allusions to ancient myth has a distancing effect. Critics like Douglas Bush and Thomas Swann have described her art as “escapist” and elitist because of its complexity (qtd. in Friedman “Who Buried H.D.?” 53). Though H.D. writes from direct experience in London during the Blitz, the mythological content of her non-combatant poetry seems to *distance* it from war. I argue that critics like Bush and Swann who read H.D.'s poetry in this manner discount it too quickly. They ignore H.D.'s use of time and place as a means of connecting to her audience and they do not acknowledge the possibility that H.D.'s fragmentary poetics may be purposeful.

H.D. describes her use of myth in a letter to Pearson. She writes, “The parallel between ancient Egypt and ‘ancient’ London is obvious—in I, one, the ‘fallen roof leaves the sealed room open to the air’ is, of course true of our own house of life—outer violence touching the deepest hidden subconscious terrors etc. and we see so much of our past ‘on show’” (“to Pearson [undated]” 32). H.D. notes that the ruins of ancient Egypt open previously sealed, private spaces and argues that this is true also of the destruction in London. The broken architecture of both Ancient Egypt and wartime London allows the “outer violence” to enter into human consciousness. It also draws attention to the past, displaying the interiors of homes and buildings like “rare objects in a museum” (*Walls* 1.28). Here, H.D.'s attention to time and setting opens to the past. By aligning London with Egypt she encourages the reader to see patterns in history, understanding the trauma of the present as a common human experience.

Pearson himself celebrates the salience of H.D.'s poetry as having common appeal to readers. On August 31, 1944 he writes after reading *Tribute to the Angels*: “I’ve been reading the new mss with terrific enthusiasm and do think you’ve hit a very fine stride. The tone is right and the feeling is as sure as ever... These are ‘relief’ poems...” (“to H.D. 31 Aug. 1944” 42). Pearson

demonstrates his “terrific enthusiasm” for H.D.’s poetry as culturally relevant and important. His assertions that “the tone is right” and the feeling “sure” suggest his belief in H.D.’s ability to speak to and for her time and to offer some kind of aid to her readers. He encourages H.D. to publish a war trilogy, not because she writes poems of celebration or victory, but because her poems offer “relief.” As Herman explains, “Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others” (214). Personal connection bridges the cultural sense of fragmentation and H.D. offers her poetry as a means of creating that connection with and for her readers. But for poetry to work as a form of connection requires that readers do more than read passively. Readers must play a role in “sustaining the bonds,” not allowing H.D.’s allusions to distance them as Bush and Swann do.

Chapter 3: Responsibility and Dialogic Expectation

we know each other
by secret symbols (*Walls* 13.13-14)

Critiques of *Trilogy* as distanced from its cultural context center on the difficulty and inaccessibility of H.D.'s language. In her reviews in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Babette Deutsch addresses concerns about H.D.'s linguistic difficulty. She writes that H.D. uses “unwieldy abstractions” and that she “jostles one reference against another, so that the reader is bewildered by the multiplicity of associations” (Deutsch “Last of the Imagists”). Deutsch’s criticism reveals a concern that H.D.’s language does not convey meaning—or at least does so in a manner too difficult for readers to understand.²⁰ In a way, Deutsch’s concerns are accurate. H.D. does blend references to mythology and scripture in a way that might disorient an unfamiliar reader. However, Deutsch’s critiques mirror the questions that H.D. explores in her writing. H.D.’s poetry and letters demonstrate a keen awareness of both the power and limitations of language. Unlike Deutsch, I argue that H.D. is aware and even purposeful in the creation of linguistic difficulty in her letters and poetry; she treats language as a puzzle and expects the reader to participate in solving it.

When H.D. ‘plays’ with language through words with multiple meanings and allusions in her letters, she trusts that Pearson understands her. Because letters create meaning through an exchange, H.D. can gage Pearson’s understanding through his responses. The expectation for response in letters then allows H.D. to explore the power and limitations of language. Reading *Trilogy* in light of the H.D.-Pearson correspondence reveals a similar expectation for response in H.D.’s poetry. H.D. layers complex allusions and words with multiple inner meanings

²⁰ Deutsch’s review of *Tribute to the Angels* shows a similar concern. She writes, “But for the most part the reader is aware merely of what the poet seeks to translate into words, and of the inadequacy of this attempt” (“Survivors of the Blitz”).

throughout *Trilogy*, inviting the reader to respond and participate through research and analytic interpretation. As an epistolary poet, H.D. imagines her poetry as a dialogic space, and so places her readers in a special position in the creation of meaning. By highlighting the multiple meanings within words, H.D. gives the reader agency in interpretation. H.D.'s difficult or fractured use of language also recreates a cultural and personal experience of fragmentation that, like the physical absence between correspondents, should impel participation and connection. She expects her readers to invest in her writing and if they do, her poetry functions as a space for connection that combats personal and cultural fragmentation for any reader, regardless of time and place.

H.D.'s anxieties about physical and linguistic disconnection manifest in her letters in what I describe as *epistolary responsibility*. In the creation of this term I play on the word 'response' within the meaning of responsibility as duty or obligation. Impelled by a sense of temporal and geographic fragmentation or isolation, letter writers feel a *responsibility to respond*. Pearson alludes to this responsibility when he writes of his embarrassment about a late response: "So long is it overdue that I blush" ("to H.D. 31 Aug. 1944" 41). The power of epistolary connection lies in its responsibility: in its creation of a written dialogue (full of responses) for which both writers feel a shared ownership and interest. Letter writing blurs or turns over the relationship between writer and audience present in other forms of writing. Because both correspondents experience writing and reading they can connect in a way that writers and readers in other genres cannot.

H.D. and Pearson's epistolary responsibility, which follows from their strong personal connection and understanding, allows them to manipulate language in ways they both understand. Throughout their correspondence H.D. and Pearson frequently reference locations,

shared friends, and acquaintances by abbreviation or nickname. H.D. writes, “I will be with you in your 233 Hall. I will be so happy again with MSS at La Paix, & I hope Lugano. This really to send V—I will write Mr.—Dr. McG—you will send the address? P rang last night...” (“to Pearson 16 April 1951” 102). 233 Hall refers to Pearson’s office at Yale, indicating that H.D. plans a trip to the United States. “P,” H.D.’s daughter Perdita, has recently given birth to her first child, “V,” a baby boy named Valentine (Hollenberg 117). “Dr. McG” is the Reverend Magee, who would officiate at the christening of Perdita’s baby boy (Hollenberg 117). H.D. trusts that Pearson understands her abbreviations, which are themselves a fragmented form of language. This kind of allusion works in a private correspondence because the writer and audience are so intimately connected.

To this point, Margaretta Jolly posits, “We might say that the literal correspondence between the writer and reader provides the letter’s epistemological foundation, unsettling the linguistic correspondence between writing and world, signifier and signifier, of more public genres. Put simply, the ‘truth’ of the writing is in the relationship rather than in its subject” (93). As Jolly explains, the truth or meaning of the letter is in the “correspondence,” or as I would contend, in the connection it fosters. Epistolary connection as truth disturbs the relationship between “writing and world” as we usually understand it because the recipient of a letter can bridge gaps in meaning that a general reader may not. H.D.’s and Pearson’s special understanding allows them to communicate through fragmentation—to use fragments of language as a mode of connection.

The allusions in H.D. and Pearson’s letters often include words with multiple inner meanings. During the war, H.D. and Pearson play on the word Puritan. Writing from Cornwall in 1944 H.D. claims: “But I am still wallowing in the *quiet*. I have my ‘Puritan’ conscience out of

its cupboard & it is making me feel wretched & ‘guilty’ at leaving you all there in bomb-alley” (“to Pearson 31 July 1944” 38). H.D. spent most of the war in London, but here she takes a hiatus to the safety of Cornwall. When H.D. returned to London from Switzerland at the onset of the Second World War she did so out of a sense of conscience and loyalty (Hollenberg 17). Bryher describes this attitude as “the Puritan element,” which Pearson also shared (qtd. in Hollenberg 17). In one letter he describes himself as a “punished Puritan” because he saves “what should be best for last” and then runs out of time for the long, thoughtful letters he wishes to write (“to H.D. 23 Jan. 1946” 50). “Puritan” has another meaning for H.D. and Pearson beyond its designation as conscientious, self-controlling behavior. Pearson used Puritan as his codename for his work for the Office of Strategic Services during the war (Hollenberg 17). When H.D. discusses her “Puritan conscience” and Pearson describes himself as a “punished Puritan” they also allude to Pearson’s codename. With this other, secret meaning, “Puritan” becomes symbolic of their friendship and understanding of each other because it allows them to connect in a unique way. For H.D., written correspondence allows for an ideal writer-reader relationship.

In her ‘play’ with language, H.D. also recognizes the possible inadequacy of language to express meaning. As a letter writer and as a poet H.D. relies on written language as a means of expression and hopes that her reader comprehends the meaning she intends. In both her letters and poetry H.D. demonstrates her awareness of the potential dangers of the inadequacy of language to express meaning. In her letters, H.D. demonstrates a deep and repetitive concern that Pearson “understand” her (“to Pearson 9 Aug. 1943” 26). Letter writing fosters intimacy through language; at the moment of reading the recipient of a letter has only the words on that page and prior knowledge of his or her correspondent to interpret their meaning. However, sometimes

H.D. and Pearson's mutual understanding is too great for words. In December of 1938 H.D. finishes a letter to Pearson, "Always- and really no words with which to say it- H." ("to Pearson 2 Dec. 1938"). Language fails H.D. when she attempts to express the depth of her appreciation for Pearson's friendship and help. Similarly, when she thanks Pearson for his "special understanding" in April of 1958 she explains, "I can't write of that now—but you must surely *feel* it" ("to Pearson 25 April 1958" 222). H.D. identifies a gap in expression that language cannot fill. But paradoxically, her expression of this gap does communicate *something* about her affection and gratitude in that the nature of her feeling goes beyond language. The slipperiness of language does not preclude H.D. from writing. Instead, it provides her with an opportunity to express something even deeper about her connection with Pearson. The cycle of response in H.D. and Pearson's letters takes power from crises in language.

H.D. discusses the possible inadequacy of language explicitly in *Trilogy*. Like letters, poetry offers H.D. an opportunity for expression *through* the limitations of language. H.D.'s speaker often searches for meaning and does so through writing or other language related exercises:

jottings on a margin,
 indecipherable palimpsest scribbled over
 with too many contradictory emotions,
 search for finite definition
 of the indefinite, stumbling toward
 vague cosmic expression, (*Walls* 31.1-8)

In this passage, the speaker struggles to find meaning through writing. As the speaker jots and scribbles, the “indecipherable palimpsest”²¹ on the page confuses her in her search for “finite definition” or meaning. Her rewriting has “scribbled over,” layering contradictory emotions on the page. Here, the word “emotions” appears where we might expect ‘thoughts’ or ‘ideas.’ The search for meaning through writing is an emotional, personal venture for the speaker aligned with the *feeling* H.D. shares with Pearson. The word “palimpsest” indicates that the speaker has scribbled and rewritten so many times that she can no longer read her own writing. Language denoting a lack of meaning—indecipherable, contradictory, indefinite, and vague—layers the poem with a palimpsestic imprecision that reflects the speaker’s stumbling trek toward a “vague cosmic expression.” The speaker fails to find an absolute meaning, instead discovering “too many” possible significances.

In this passage, the speaker’s anxiety about language and meaning does not deter her from continuing to write; H.D.’s speaker still attempts to approach a “cosmic expression” through writing, even if it is vague. The word “cosmic” might imply that the meaning the speaker looks for is universal, pointing toward its deep importance. Or, the speaker expresses her frustration with the lofty, impersonal connotations of “cosmic.” Although language is contradictory, indefinite, and vague, she must still use it in her search for meaning. In “‘We have a secret. We are alive’: H.D.’s *Trilogy* as a Response to War,” Sarah H.S. Graham argues that wartime poets and artists often experience a wavering sense of usefulness when “aesthetic issues are likely to be overwhelmed by the primitive matter of war” (171). While I agree that this section of *The Walls Do Not Fall* demonstrates the poet’s anxiety about her role in wartime, the

²¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines palimpsest as “A parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing,” (palimpsest, n.).

root of that concern is not simply in “aesthetic issues.” Instead, the poet remarks on the futility of written language in expressing meaning. Her never-ending, stumbling search for meaning through collapsing language echoes the physical wreckage she witnesses in the “ruin everywhere”—the roofless temples and shrines (*Walls* 1.13, 16). The inexpressibility of that deconstruction highlights the limitations of language, but paradoxically it also inspires H.D. to write in an attempt to connect to her reader, particularly within the context of wartime trauma.

H.D.’s speaker’s identification of the limitations of language reflects the inexpressibility of her traumatic, wartime setting. The violence of war results in a loss for words. Judith Herman explains, “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*” (Herman 1). Herman argues that a crisis of language relates directly to violence and trauma. Violence lies beyond words. H.D.’s identification of the limitations of language also reflects what Richard Sheppard explains in “The Crisis of Language” (1976) as a “disturbance” about the inadequacy of language that runs deep in modern poetry (323-325). Sheppard, a scholar of German language and European Modernism, examines writers like Eliot, Yeats, and Rilke, arguing that modernist poetry reflects a broader cultural sense of fractured-ness (324). In *Trilogy*, fractured-ness is physical, cultural, and also linguistic. But for H.D., the crisis of language does not extend to a deconstructive understanding. Instead, H.D. manages to use the breakdown of language as a means of further expression.

H.D. highlights multiple meanings within words and makes complex allusions throughout *Trilogy*, expecting her reader to understand or at least to make an attempt to do so. Often, H.D. uses hyphens to reveal hidden significances. For example, she explains, “Osiris equates O-sir-is or O-Sire-is” (*Walls* 40.1-4). H.D. hyphenates the word Osiris into new syllable divisions. In

doing so, she highlights potential words and meanings inside of the original word, emphasizing ‘sir’ and ‘Sire.’ She demonstrates the instability in what readers would otherwise conceive of as a simple name. Her creation of compounds and interest in the potential words within words demonstrate a desire to discover hidden meanings within language. H.D. continues this project through her use of italics. At the beginning of section 16 of *The Walls Do Not Fall* the three Egyptian gods, “Ra, Osiris, *Amen* appeared” (16.1). But the next time ‘Amen’ appears the context is less clear: “we have always worshipped Him, / we have always said, *forever and ever, Amen*” (*Walls* 16.18). A traditional, Biblical understanding of ‘Amen’ would be as the end a prayer, affirming what has come before. However, if the Egyptian god Amen is the capitalized Him that “we” have always worshiped, “*forever and ever, Amen*” may also refer to him. Amen, the Egyptian god, is often spelled Amun or Amon, so H.D.’s use of Amen seems to create ambiguity intentionally (“Amun”). Significantly, the name Amen or Amun means “the hidden one” (“Amun”).

In her use of Amen, H.D. reflects Bakhtin’s theory that “no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object...” (276). According to Bakhtin, every word is in dialogue with multiple meanings and so lends itself to elastic interpretations. H.D. continues to explore the dual meanings of Amen later in *The Walls Do Not Fall*. For example, she writes, “where the grasshopper says / *Amen, Amen, Amen*” (*Walls* 23.10) and “*Amen, / only just now, / my heart-shell / breaks open*” (*Walls* 25.31). In these examples the meaning of the word Amen is completely ambiguous and H.D. highlights the interchangeability of its meaning with her italics. Standing alone, Amen cannot convey its meaning. Like any word, Amen responds to the words that have come before it and anticipates

those that come after (Bakhtin 280). In other words, ‘Amen’ needs context to differentiate between meanings, but even then it can still remain ambiguous. By obscuring the meaning of Amen, H.D. demonstrates the necessity of understanding language in a dialogic sense. *Trilogy* presents the reader with various meanings to discover, giving him or her a certain amount of power in interpretation.

H.D.’s italicization of Amen reflects a larger pattern in *Trilogy* in which H.D. appropriates Biblical or common phrases and sets them in a new context. The dialogic elements of her poetry expand from the level of the word to the level of language and social discourses. At the end of part 10 she writes, “*in the beginning / was the Word*” (*Walls* 10.15-16). Taken from the book of John, these lines originally refer to “the Word” as divine truth (John 1:1). But in her poem, H.D. means ‘the word’ as the unit of language or poetry. H.D. equates the written word with divine truth. Appearing “in the beginning,” the word predates violence and the Sword (*Walls* 10.11-16). Although violence seems to cause or at least to highlight a failure of language, language and the word has lasting power. H.D. demonstrates that even whole, well-known phrases can be taken out of context and given new meaning, encouraging her readers to identify new connections even on a linguistic level.

Critics like Scott Boehnen (1995) and Helen Emmitt (2004) who address H.D.’s attention to language often emphasize her belief in the power of language. Boehnen argues that *Trilogy* offers a “language fantasy” that may seem retrogressive (198). As Boehnen suggests, H.D. does make claims for the transcendence of language, but her movements in doing so are hardly “retrogressive.” In the term “retrogressive,” Boehnen notes that H.D.’s optimism about language may seem naïve or nostalgic in comparison to her modernist contemporaries. To this point, Emmitt distinguishes H.D. from poets like Eliot, Pound, and Yeats, arguing that H.D. views

language as a life-giving force, not as something “broken” (135). Boehnen, Emmitt, and many others overlook the anxiety about language and attention to fragmentation that H.D.’s writing does exhibit. H.D. is keenly aware of the limitations of language. Her recognition of its breakdown, particularly in wartime, allows her to then assert a kind of power through it in her manipulation of meaning through hyphens and italics. Her work embodies a paradoxical relationship between language and war in its attempt to obscure and discover meaning.

Like her letters, H.D.’s poems are filled with allusion, but her public audience does not have the personal relationship that would allow them to readily access every ‘truth’ of H.D.’s writing. Imagining *Trilogy* as a form of correspondence is then complicated. For some readers her allusions are difficult and even alienating. Often, H.D.’s allusions are inextricably tied to her language play. For example, in section 8 of *A Tribute to the Angels* she writes:

Now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame
under, till *marah-mar*
are melted, fuse and join
and change and alter,
mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary,
Star of the Sea,
Mother. (*Tribute* 8.7-14).

In this passage the speaker describes a melding of a series of meanings and languages. Marah is the feminine form of mar, meaning bitter in Hebrew (“marah, n.”). From Old English, mar is also an obstruction or hindrance, while in Spanish it means sea (“mar, n.”). Already we have multiple meanings for “marah-mar”: bitter-bitter (a combination of feminine and masculine), bitter-

obstruction, and bitter-sea. These meanings “change and alter” when the speaker continues to align words through common sounds and etymologies. “Mer” and “mere” are Old English forms of mar, but they also have common roots to “mar” meaning sea (“mar, n.”). “Mer” is sea in French and “mere” is a small lake or pond (Barnstone 187). From “mere” the speaker transitions to “mère,” which is French for mother, and then to “mater,” mother in Latin. Maia is a mother figure in Greek mythology and Mary is the mother of Jesus (Barnstone 187). The name Mary unites the varying meanings in this chain of words. She is a recognizable mother figure, but part of the Greek root of her name may be interpreted as “sea” (“Mary, n.”). She is both “Star of the Sea,” and “Mother.” Again, H.D. draws attention to the slippery meanings of words by drawing etymological connections. But in order to access and understand her language play, H.D.’s readers must be familiar with a variety of languages and etymologies. Reading her letters with the poetry is helpful in this vein because it draws the reader’s attention to the presence of allusions. H.D. seems to expect an understanding from her readers comparative to the epistolary connection she builds with Pearson.

Taking epistolarity as a frame, H.D.’s poetry attempts to replicate the connection and responsibility she builds with Pearson as a reader. The difficulty of *Trilogy* offers a challenge to readers to take an active role in interpretation, which may involve outside research and reflection. As Bakhtin asserts, “A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all” (281). H.D.’s juxtaposition of allusions invites the reader to join her in a discovery of hidden meanings and parallels—she does much more than what Babette Deutsch describes as ‘jostling’ “unwieldy abstractions...so that the reader is bewildered” by her obscure, mystical poetics (Deutsch “Last of the Imagists”). Surrounded by the “desolation” and “ruin everywhere” in London in the 1940s, H.D. clings to language (*Walls* 1.19, 16). She recognizes the limitations of

language to express a single meaning and uses its slipperiness to create a dialogic understanding that then connects these various meanings. H.D.'s attention to the multiple meanings of words indicates that the reader need not grasp one true understanding. Rather, *Trilogy* encourages the reader to reach for something, even if it is a "vague cosmic expression," (*Walls* 31.1-8).

By encouraging her readers to read actively, H.D. attempts to create a space for an even broader connection. Herman argues that "the group" provides the strongest antidote to traumatic experience: "Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity" (Herman 214). If readers enter into a dialogue with poetry, they begin to form a group as respondents. The fragmentary, unstable nature of language itself speaks to, or rather corresponds with, the physical and psychological fragmentation of H.D.'s world. Her layering of allusion provides her contemporary readers with a fragmentary reading experience that mirrors their world and then also anticipates their criticism. She also provides future readers with the distanced reading experience that reflects their separation from the time of her writing. Fragmentation, which here includes the physical distance between letter writers, the sense of fractured-ness that many modernist writers identify, and the physical ruin of London, drives H.D. to "bridge gaps," and to connect with her readers through writing. The difficulty of her writing *expresses* disconnection and fragmentation, an expression that then (again, paradoxically) forms a connection.

Coda: The Problem of Audience and The Art of 'Being on the Same Page'

“There are so many reasons for choosing poetry, and in truth not the least would be the semantic aura of the particular poem in terms of the reader, his accidental association as well as his critical perception. The former seems as valid to me in terms of a reader as the latter.” —Norman Holmes Pearson²²

Written correspondence is unique in its ability to address a specific audience. When H.D. writes to Pearson she can take certain liberties with her use of language and abbreviation because of the understanding they have developed. In other words, H.D. and Pearson can play with language in a connecting manner through their ability to respond to each other. Theoretically, if Pearson misunderstands something in H.D.’s letters he can ask for clarification and she can provide it. But unlike a correspondent, a poet cannot control who reads her poetry. H.D. cannot assume that her readers have a background in Egyptian mythology, that they have read the Bible, or that they understand what London was like during the Blitz. While reviews and criticism provide H.D. with a form of response, her poetry cannot enter into the same continuous *cycle* of response present within her letters.

Understanding the linguistic difficulty of H.D.’s *Trilogy* as an invitation for readers to read actively, then, opens questions about the responsibility—both obligation and ability to respond—of writers and readers. If readers miss H.D.’s references or miss the salience of her poetry for its Second World War moment, who is at fault? Does the poet have a responsibility to readers to make her meaning clear and easily accessible? Does the reader have an obligation to research and think until he or she discovers or creates some kind of meaning?

Answers to these questions would depend on extensive debates about the purpose of poetry and the nature of meaning and its creation: Must poetry have universal appeal? Must that appeal be obvious or readily available to a “common” reader? Is “meaning” something that a

²² Pearson, Norman Holmes. Letter to H.D., 23 Jan. 1946. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 51. Print.

reader can even access or discover, or does the reader herself make meaning through interpretation? These are not debates that I attempt to resolve or answer definitely. Instead, I turn to my own experience as a reader.

I have felt impelled to respond to the depth and complexity of H.D.'s writing. Although I felt an immediate connection to the opening lines of *The Walls Do Not Fall*—"But we fight for life, / we fight, they say, for breath"—the sections that follow seemed difficult and somewhat inaccessible to me. But after more careful reading, as well as multiple consultations with the *OED* and mythological dictionaries, I began to appreciate *Trilogy* and to recognize its complexity as an opportunity for discovery. As I uncovered etymology and myth I felt increasingly connected to H.D.'s poetry and to her world. Returning to the dialogic understanding of writing and reading I have traced throughout this paper, I posit that the writer and reader share responsibility in the creation of meaning. Bakhtin writes that "To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding" (282). Applying Bakhtin's theory, the reader as a respondent has "primacy" and even agency in interpretation. With this agency comes responsibility. Responding is active, meaning that the reader may have to work to reach some kind of understanding. Yet, of course the reader does not respond in a vacuum; the reader always responds to whatever she or he reads. If H.D. attempts to speak to or for her time through her poetry, and if she wishes to have a broader appeal, she must give her reader material to which he or she can respond. This provision of material, I argue, is a major project of her writing and the driving force behind my own sense of responsibility as a reader.

While I reached a deeper understanding of *Trilogy* through research, reading H.D.'s correspondence provided me with an even greater leap in appreciation and connection. As I read

her reflections on her writing process and daily life I began to feel as though I was “on the same page” with H.D.—both literally and figuratively. I wrote myself into her words, imagining that she was speaking to me and that I, in turn, could correspond with her. Every reading of *Trilogy* since the time I first opened Donna Hollenberg’s edition of H.D. and Pearson’s letters has yielded new meanings to me; *Trilogy* and her letters remain a locus of discovery.

The study of letters and epistolarity has emerged as a subject within literary criticism only in the last few decades. Langdon Hammer explains that critics have most often treated a writer’s letters like straightforward biographical information (165). In this way letters become “oddly supplemental, a genre somehow unworthy of, or resistant to, the modes of evaluation and analysis that critics bring to poetry, even while it remains a resource for criticism, supplying something poems seem to lack” (Hammer 165). By using letters solely as biographical information, traditional criticism denies their literary merit and misses a potential means for understanding the connections across a writer’s oeuvre. I join Hammer in urging readings of letters as art—readings that do apply literary frames of analysis. Reading H.D.’s letters, and by extension reading H.D.’s poetry with a similar awareness, allows readers to bridge gaps, connecting art and life in a way that returns attention to the central humanity of literature.

Works Cited

Alloday, Lawrence. "Durrant's Press Cuttings Life and Letters." *Sunday Times*. 2 Jul. 1944.

Print.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. The Ohio State University Press

Open Access Initiative. The Ohio State University Press, 1982. Web. 1 Feb. 2012.

"Amun." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. Encyclopedia Mythica Online. Web. 10 Dec. 2011.

Bakhtin, M. M. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of

Texas Press, 1981. 274-301. Print.

Boehnen, Scott. "'H. D., War Poet' and the 'Language Fantasy' of *Trilogy*." *Sagetrieb: A*

Journal Devoted to Poets in the Imagist/Objectivist Tradition 14.1-2 (1995): 179-200.

Web. 10 Jan. 2012.

Bogan, Louise. Review of *The Walls Do Not Fall*. *The New Yorker*. 21 Oct. 1944. Print.

Calder, Angus. *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico, 1991. Print

Davidson, Gustav. *A Dictionary of Angels Including the Fallen Angels*. New York: Simon &

Schuster, Inc., 1967. Web. 25 Feb. 2012.

"Deracinated, a." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. 30

Jan. 2012.

Deutsch, Babette. "Last of the Imagists." *New York Herald Tribune*. 1 Oct. 1944. Print.

---. "Survivors of the Blitz." *New York Herald Tribune*. 6 Jan. 1946. Print.

Doolittle, Hilda. "H.D. by Delia Alton." *The Iowa Review* 16.3 (1986): 180-221. Web. 5 Jan.

2012.

---. Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 12 Dec. 1937. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters*

of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University

- of Iowa Press, 1997. 8-11. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 14 Dec. 1937. H.D. Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 2 Dec. 1938. H.D. Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 15 May 1943. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 24-25. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 9 Aug. 1943. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 26. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 26 Aug. 1943. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 28-29. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 31 July 1944. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 37-38. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 11 Sep. 1944. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 43. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 29 July 1945. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 46-47. Print.

- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 11 June 1946. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 56. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 25 July 1953. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 142. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. 30 April 1958. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 222. Print.
- . Letter to Norman Holmes Pearson. Undated. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 30-33. Print.
- . *The Flowering of the Rod. Trilogy*. Ed. Alik Barnstone. New York: New Directions, 1998. Print.
- . *Tribute to the Angels. Trilogy*. Ed. Alik Barnstone. New York: New Directions, 1998. Print.
- . *Trilogy*. Ed. Norman Holmes Pearson. New York: New Directions, 1973. Print.
- . *The Walls Do Not Fall. Trilogy*. Ed. Alik Barnstone. New York: New Directions, 1998. Print.
- “DSM Criteria for PTSD.” National Center for PTSD. *United States Department of Veterans Affairs*. 20 Dec. 2011. Web. 13 April 2012.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. “Romantic Thralldom in H.D.” *Contemporary Literature* (20.2): 1979. Web. 7 March 2012.

Emmitt, Helen V. "Forgotten Memories and Unheard Rhythms: H. D.'s Poetics as a Response to Male Modernism." *Paideuma: Studies in American and British Modernist Poetry* 33.2-3 (2004): 131-53. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

The English Standard Version Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with Apocrypha. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. Print.

---. "Who Buried H.D.?: A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in 'The Literary Tradition.'" *H.D.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 45-61. Print.

Graham, Sarah H. S. "'We have a Secret. We are alive': H.D.'s *Trilogy* as a Response to War." *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 44.2 (2002): 161. Web. 12 Dec. 2011.

Gubar, Susan. "The Echoing Spell of H. D.'s *Trilogy*." *H.D.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 63-78. Print.

Guest, Barbara. *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1984. Print.

Guillén, Claudio. "On the Edge of Literariness: The Writing of Letters." *Comparative Literature Studies* 31.1 (1994): 1-24. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.

Hamblen, Jessica and Carole Goguen. "Community Violence." National Center for PTSD. *United States Department of Veterans Affairs.* 20 Dec. 2011. Web. 13 April 2012.

Hammer, Langdon. "Useless Concentration: Life and Work in Elizabeth Bishop's Letters and Poems." *American Literary History* 9.1 (1997): 162-80. Web. 10 Nov. 2011.

Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery.* New York: Basic Books, 1992. Print.

"Hermes." *Encyclopedia Mythica.* Encyclopedia Mythica Online. Web. 10 Dec. 2011.

- Hickman, Miranda B. “‘Uncanonically seated’: H.D. and Literary Canons.” *The Cambridge Companion to H.D.* Eds. Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 9-22. Print.
- Hollenberg, Donna Krolik. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. Print.
- Hollenberg, Donna Krolik and Louis H. Silverstein. “The Challenges of Editing the H. D. Pearson Correspondence.” *H.D. Newsletter* 4.1 (1991): 18-26. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.
- Jolly, Margaretta and Liz Stanley. “Letters as / Not a Genre.” *Life Writing* 2.2 (2005): 91. Web. 13 Jan. 2012.
- “London Re-Blitz.” *Life*. 16.11 (1944): 30-31. Print.
- “mar, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. 23 March 2012.
- “marah, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. 23 March 2012.
- “Mary, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. 23 March 2012.
- Morris, Adalaide. “The Concept of Projection: H.D.’s Visionary Powers.” *H.D.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 101-122. Print.
- “palimpsest, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. 8 April 2012.
- Pearson, Norman Holmes. Letter to H.D. 15 Nov. 1938. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.

- . Letter to H.D. 9 July 1943. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 31 Aug. 1944. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 41-42. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 20 Jan. 1946. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 23 Jan. 1946. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Ed. Donna K. Hollenberg. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 50. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 28 Aug. 1946. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 9 Nov. 1946. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 20 July. 1948. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- . Letter to H.D. 22 Feb. 1951. Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT. Print.
- Phillips, Siobhan. "All Together Now: How Description Fosters Connection." Rev. of *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines* by Julie Carr, *The Bigger World* by Noelle Kocot, *Shoulder Season* by Ange Mlinko, *The Network* by Jena Osman. *Boston Review* (37.1): 2012. Web. 15 April 2012.
- Quinn, Vincent. *Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967. Print.

- “Remembering the Blitz.” *Museum of London*. Museum of London, 19 Apr. 2005. Web. 2 Feb. 2011.
- Robinson, Janice S. *H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982. Print.
- Sheppard, Richard. “The Crisis of Language.” *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. 3-336. Print.
- “Thoth.” *Encyclopedia Mythica*. Encyclopedia Mythica Online. Web. 10 Dec. 2011.
- Tytell, John. “Epiphany in Chaos: Fragmentation in Modernism.” *New York Literary Forum* 8-9 (1981): 3-15. Web. 24 Jan. 2012.
- Williams, Oscar. “Ladies’ Day” Review of *The Walls Do Not Fall*. *The New Republic*. 1944. Print.

Works Consulted

- Barton, David ed. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 2000. Print.
- Collecott, Diana. “Remembering Oneself: The Reputation and Latter Poetry of H. D.” *Critical Quarterly* 27.1 (1985): 7-22. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Differance.” *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Ed. David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007. 932-949. Print.
- Dillon, Sarah. *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. London: Continuum, 2007. Print.
- Esdale, Logan. “Gertrude Stein, Laura Riding and the Space of Letters.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.4 (2006): 99-123. Web. 10 Nov. 2011.

- Ferguson, Frances. "Interpreting the Self through Letters." *Centrum* 1.2 (1981): 107-12. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.
- Kauffman, Linda S. *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Print.
- Lendinara, Patrizia. "Binding Words and Feelings: Nominal Compounds in the Trilogy." *H. D.'s Poetry: 'the Meanings that Words Hide.'* Ed. Marina Camboni. Brooklyn, NY: AMS, 2003. 115-141. Print.
- MacKay, Marina. *Modernism and World War II*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Pearson, Norman Holmes and L.S. Dembo. "Norman Holmes Pearson on H.D.: An Interview." *Contemporary Literature* 10.4 (1969): 435-446. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Harm's Way: Language and the Contemporary Arts of War." *PMLA* 124.5 (2009) 1515-1531. Print.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. "Nature of the Linguistic Sign." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Ed. David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. 842-851. Print.
- Stanton, Domna C. and Jeanine Parisier Plottel. *The Female Autograph*. New York: *New York Literary Forum*, 1984. Print.