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“WE RISE FROM DEATH AND LIVE” *Trilogy*,
Majic Ring, and H.D.’s Spiritualist War Poetics

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Abstract

This thesis reads the American expatriate poet H.D.’s tripartite poem *Trilogy*, composed in London during World War Two, as a spiritualist war epic. Though the influence of occultism on H.D.’s work has been given more critical attention in recent years, her foray into spiritualism remains relatively unstudied. The primary aim of this project is to illustrate how H.D.’s experiences in spiritualist séances during the war years, as depicted in the recently published autobiographical text *Majic Ring* (composed 1943-1944, published 2009), shaped the writing of her modernist epic and its optimistic vision of worldwide spiritual resurrection out of the wreckage of modernity. This reading reveals how spiritualism offered H.D. an avenue for restoring meaning and dignity to death itself under historical circumstances in which death, on a mass industrial scale, was intentionally perpetuated to preclude meaning and signified the absolute annihilation of the body, legacy, tradition, and cultural memory.

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Thesis Title: "WE RISE FROM DEATH AND LIVE" *Trilogy, Majic Ring*, and H.D.'s Spiritualist War Poetics

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

“WE RISE FROM DEATH AND LIVE”
Trilogy, Majic Ring, and H.D.’s Spiritualist War Poetics

by

Isabel Rae McKenzie

April 23, 2019

The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry one course of credit in
the Department of English

Davis Schneiderman
Krebs Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Joshua Corey, Chairperson

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ABSTRACT

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For my mother, Cecilia Rae McKenzie.

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The Scientist of Faith
His research has but just begun —
Above his synthesis
The Flora unimpeachable
To Time's Analysis —
"Eye hath not seen" may possibly
Be current with the Blind
But let not Revelation
By theses be detained —

—Emily Dickinson, #1241

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INTRODUCTION

It is not now so much a question of laying a ghost, as of recalling a Spirit.
—H.D., *Majic Ring*

This thesis focuses on the American expatriate poet H.D. (born Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961) and two of her texts written in London during World War Two: the ambitious three-book modernist war epic *Trilogy* (composed 1942-1944), consisting of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*, and the autobiographical prose work *Majic Ring* (composed 1943-1944), written in epistolary and journal form. While *Trilogy* has produced much criticism since the 1980s, the latter text was posthumously published in 2009 and so has yet to see significant scholarly engagement. *Majic Ring* is H.D.'s account of her foray into the practices of spiritualism coinciding with her writing of *Trilogy*; thus this thesis places these two textual narratives in conversation, illustrating how H.D.'s heterodox pursuit shaped the writing of her war epic and its optimistic vision of individual and worldly spiritual resurrection during a modern age of mechanized mass death and fascism.

There is little criticism that reads *Trilogy* through the lens of H.D.'s spiritualist practices; moreover, scholars have not engaged *Trilogy* or *Majic Ring* in a mode that locates H.D.'s spiritualism as a reaction to and within the framework of World War Two. More generally, the landscape of the war is often neglected in readings of the epic. As Sarah H.S. Graham argues, scholars have “consistently shied away from addressing [*Trilogy*] as war poetry, as if that were too obvious a response and therefore undeserving of sustained attention” (162). One recent critic goes as

far as to state that “the poetic narratives in the first two books are so evanescent that it is usually impossible to pinpoint physical location or historic time,” despite the fact that H.D. identifies each book of *Trilogy* by its date and location of writing (Harrell 85).¹ Since the revival of scholarly interest in H.D. following Susan Stanford Friedman’s publication of *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* in the 1980s, which approaches the poet and her work through a feminist perspective, critical engagement with *Trilogy* has predominantly contextualized the work not via the physical, cultural, and political landscape of World War Two but within H.D.’s pre-war psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud, representing the poet’s “belief that Freud’s reading of the unconscious would ‘save mankind’” as the central discourse of the epic (Barnstone xiii). Alternatively or in tandem, a number of critics read *Trilogy* as a modernist palimpsest (similar to T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”) with an intense focus on H.D.’s mystical feminist synthesizing and re-visioning of various myths and Judeo-Christian traditions. In the past, the latter was my avenue for engaging the work.

More recently, as certain unpublished and posthumously published H.D. works are brought to wider critical attention, *Trilogy* has begun to be read through the lens of the poet’s occultism which syncretizes the teachings and traditions of Tarot, astrology, Kabbalism, Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, and Hermeticism. These critical narratives, however, usually absorb H.D.’s spiritualism as merely a small subset of her occultism, a tendency which deemphasizes the degree to which the poet’s participation in séances shaped *Trilogy* and does not acknowledge necessary

¹ *The Walls Do Not Fall* is labeled “from London 1942,” *Tribute to the Angels* signed “London / May 17-31, 1944,” and *The Flowering to the Rod*, “London / December 18-31, 1944” (italics H.D.’s).

distinctions between occultism and spiritualism as discrete heterodox belief systems, which I discuss in Chapter Two. The representation of H.D.'s spiritualism as part of her occultism is also flawed in its lack of a portrayal of the shifting nuances of H.D.'s thinking throughout her career. H.D. was exposed to occultism early on through the strands of Hermeticism in her Moravian upbringing, occult periodicals which circulated in America during her youth, and later on by her ex-fiancé and poetic mentor Ezra Pound (though he is often misrepresented by scholars as H.D.'s sole "initiator" into the world of the occult). These influences informed the totality of her life and work, while her foray into spiritualism took place only over the course of an intense decade toward the end of her career, representing and reflecting a unique moment in her thinking and writing.

Spiritualism is a belief system which affirms the survival of the soul beyond physical death, that those who have passed may go on to survive as "spirits" with whom the living are able to communicate. The primary mode of affirming this belief is through a séance, or a gathering during which a spirit "speaks" to the living through some sort of medium: an individual (called a medium, who "channels" the spirit), a table (via "table-rappings," or coded knocks), a Ouija board (wherein a wooden planchette indicates letters on a written alphabet).

H.D. participated in spiritualist séances from 1941 through 1946, coinciding with the arc of World War Two, yet there is consistent disagreement across recent scholarship regarding whether or not she can accurately be classified as a spiritualist. H.D. is generally described by scholars as an occultist, as she considered herself to be one of the "nameless initiates / born of one mother," one of the heirs of

ancient esoteric (from the Greek *esōterikós*, “belonging to an inner circle”) wisdom (*WDNF* 13.23-4). Occultism is thus characterized by its exclusivity, while, as I discuss in Chapter Two, spiritualism has historically been considered a democratic practice, requiring no special “initiation” or specific training.

In his introduction to *Majic Ring*, Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos characterizes H.D. as an occult writer due to the “radical syncretism” of her beliefs which synthesize the aforementioned branches of occultism as well as the mythologies and traditions of Egyptian, Greek, and Judeo-Christian orthodoxies. “The polyphonic, layered, paratactic nature of her poetry and prose is not only the direct result of her modernism,” Tryphonopoulos writes, “but also of her rummaging through various traditions and systems of thought” (xxiv). I maintain that H.D. is an occultist; however, Tryphonopoulos implies that H.D. cannot be considered a spiritualist because “during spiritualist séances, participants communicate exclusively with deceased persons rather than with gods or daemons” (xxv). His statement references the fact that in addition to communication with individuals once living, such as Royal Air Force men who died in combat, H.D.’s séances were a site of communication with *spiritual* figures as well. Unlike Tryphonopoulos, I operate by a more expansive and inclusive understanding of the nature of spiritualism and the notion of a “spirit,” believing that H.D., as the above epigraph suggests, conceived séances, like poetry, as a site at which one could invoke both “ghosts” and “Spirits,” both deceased individuals and ancient mythic or spiritual forces—figures “dead” insofar as they have been written over by and forgotten within modernity—as well as the most famous “Spirit,” the Holy Ghost.

Tryphonopoulos states that there are “no explicit references to spiritualism in *Trilogy*” and argues that H.D.’s experiences in séances are “not vital to understanding *Majic Ring* or *Trilogy*” (xxv, xxvii). H.D.’s epic does not contain references to table-rapping or Ouija boards; however, as I will illustrate, the work is suffused with invocations of and communications with “ghosts” and “Spirits.” I argue that in the wake of the mass deaths of World War Two, H.D. turned to spiritualism because, in affirming that the soul survives beyond death, it offered her through *Trilogy* not only an avenue for spiritually resurrecting the un/dead masses, but rescuing death *itself* from circumstances in which death, on a mass industrial scale, was intentionally perpetuated to preclude meaning and signified the absolute annihilation of the body, legacy, tradition, and cultural memory.

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; (*WDFN* 10.1-5)

This thesis, then, provides a new reading of *Trilogy* as a spiritualist war epic. In Chapter One I establish H.D. and her work within the dire landscape of the war, particularly the London Blitz under which H.D. wrote the first book of *Trilogy*, in order to illuminate how this reality acted as a catalyst for H.D.’s interest in spiritualism. Here I also contextualize the relationship between language, writing, individual humanity, and death during World War Two within the theory of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Chapter Two introduces *Majic Ring* and spiritualism as a movement, following which I elucidate the nature of H.D.’s spiritualist practices

during the 1940s and the optimistic spiritual experiences she had during her séances, which are largely a product of her relationship with British war hero and spiritualist Lord Hugh Dowding. Chapter Three applies this context to an analysis of the three books of *Trilogy*, emphasizing how H.D. invokes the un/dead, spirits, and spiritual figures throughout the work in order to realize her vision of worldwide spiritual resurrection and to reinstate dignity and meaning to the notion of death itself.

CHAPTER 1: KATABASIS

*The city is peopled
with spirits, not ghosts, O my love:
—H.D., “The City Is Peopled”*

During World War Two, H.D. lived in a small flat at 49 Lowndes Square in London. Black curtains were drawn over the windows to shut out any light, or lightening, to shut out the “violent reverberation” of guns “shatteringly near,” “the orgy of destructions . . . and constant reminder of death” (H.D. qtd. in Barnstone viii, *MR* 16). Beneath the Blitz, H.D. wrote the first book of her three-part war epic *Trilogy*, titled *The Walls Do Not Fall*, signing it, like a testimony, “*from London 1942.*”

*there is zrr-hiss,
lightning in a not-known,*

*unregistered dimension,
we are powerless,*

dust and powder fill our lungs

.....

we walk continually

*on thin air
that thickens to a blind fog, (WDNF 43.3-7, 12-14, italics H.D.’s)*

The London Blitz had begun around 4:00 in the evening of September 7, 1940, when Adolf Hitler invaded the skies of London with 348 German bombers escorted by 617 Messerschmitt fighters. American journalist Ernie Pyle, one of the war’s most famed correspondents, writes of the first night that London was “ringed and stabbed with fire”:

Into the dark shadowed spaces below us, while we watched, whole batches of incendiary bombs fell. We saw two dozen go off in two seconds. They flashed terrifically, then quickly simmered down to pin points of dazzling white, burning ferociously. . . . They had done their work—another building was on fire.

The greatest of all the fires was directly in front of us. Flames seemed to whip hundreds of feet into the air. Pinkish-white smoke ballooned upward in a great cloud, and out of this cloud there gradually took shape—so faintly at first that we weren't sure we saw correctly—the gigantic dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. (qtd. in Commager 64)

For 57 consecutive days, London was hailed with bombs. Thus the first book of *Trilogy* opens *in media res* with the poet-speaker walking through “ruin everywhere” in the wake of a raid, events colloquially referred to as “incidents” by UK newspapers:

An incident here and there,
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square;

mist and mist-grey, no colour, (*WDNF* 1.1-4)

Like the classical war epic—Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*—*Trilogy* depicts a *katabasis*, or a literal descent into the underworld or death: despite physically living through the raids, the civilian survivors—those not of the 43,000 killed—are reduced, according to the speaker, to an undead state, “heart, lungs, the brain / about to burst its brittle case” (*WDNF* 1.34-5). Spectral figures walk the smoldering

streets of London, a landscape transmogrified from modern city to industrial
underworld:

the bone-frame was made for
no such shock knit within terror,
yet the skeleton stood up to it :

the flesh? it was melted away,
the heart burnt out, dead ember,
tendons, muscles shattered, outer-husk dismembered,

yet the frame held :
we passed the flame : we wonder .
what saved us? what for? (*WDNF* 1.43-51)

H.D. describes these “men . . . drunk / with a new bewilderment, / sorcery, bedevilment” as “nameless”—stripped of their identities—and “*speechless.*” (*WDNF* 1.40-2, 20, italics mine). Philosophically, the essence of humanness has long been thought to be the capacity for speech: this is what separates human from animal. H.D.’s postulation—that the violence of the war pillaged individuals of their humanity and thus their capacity for language—recalls Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s writing on the Holocaust and the “undead” figure which emerged as a consequence of mass genocide. Scholar Justin Clemens elucidates:

Often denominated the “*Muselmann,*” this personage is crucial for Agamben in so far as what philosophy had always maintained was the essence of the human (its capacity for speech) had been fully stripped from the *Muselmänner*, who, though *surviving* as a biological organism, could no longer be recognised as human—not only by the Nazis, but by fellow camp inmates themselves. What the death camps thereby also revealed is that “man” (the mortal speaking being) can *really* be separated from his “essence” (speech)

and consigned by the most extreme expressions of sovereign power (the camps, contemporary torture) to a kind of undead subsistence. (118-9)²

Thus Agamben, in *Language and Death*, makes a pertinent distinction between two types of death, between *dying* and *deceasing*. To *die* signifies dignity, lineage, continuation; to *decease* signifies the absence of meaning in death. Those murdered through mass industrial genocide were deprived their right to *die* because they were stripped of their humanity and thus their capacity for speech:

To consent to language signifies to act in such a way that, in the abysmal experience of the taking place of language, in the removal of the voice, another Voice is disclosed to man, and along with this are also disclosed the dimension of being and the mortal risk of nothingness. To consent to the taking place of language, to listen to the Voice, signifies, thus, to consent also to death, to be capable of dying (*sterben*) rather than simply deceasing (*ableben*). (Agamben 87)

While fundamentally dissimilar to the experience created by and in concentration camps, a death by aerial bombardment, a senseless, mechanized mass

² *Muselmann* (pluralized *Muselmänner*) is the German word for Muslim, a slang term used in concentration camps “to describe the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection,” writes Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi in his memoir *If This is a Man* (1947). The term is used in numerous testimonies of concentration camp survivors including in Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946), David Rousset’s *A World Apart* (1947), and Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1958). Agamben theorizes on the problematic origins of the term in *Homo Sacer* (1998):

The most likely explanation of the term can be found in the literal meaning of the Arabic word *muslim*: the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God. It is this meaning that lies at the origins of the legends concerning Islam’s supposed fatalism, legends which are found in European cultures starting with the Middle Ages (this deprecatory sense of the term is present in European languages, particularly in Italian). (111)

death, would have rendered H.D. deceased—had she not *heard the Voice* of language, *consented* to it, and *called back* by writing:

and though there was whirr and roar in the high air,
there was a Voice louder,

though its speech was lower
than a whisper. (*WDNF* 12.13-16)

During these years, H.D., argues her biographer Barbara Guest, “wrote now to prove that creativity could conquer death” (253).³ Against these historical circumstances, it becomes easier to discern why the practice of spiritualism so attracted H.D. during the war years. Guest writes of the poet’s orientation toward the otherworld: “The blitzed houses of London—silent, dead—would provoke this. Ghosts were everywhere. The world was a place where there were only ghosts and the living, and the distinctions between the two must have been close” (260). Spiritualism, in conceiving death not as the absence of meaning, but as a site at which meaning can be found by and for the living, could offer H.D. a mode of salvaging the wreckage of modernity during the war. Through *Trilogy*, she would thus attempt to manifest a worldwide spiritual resurrection by invoking spirits to reinstate dignity to both the living and the dead, to revitalize meaning in both life and death.

³ Significantly, it was during World War Two that H.D. manifested her most productive period of creative work, writing *The Gift* (composed 1940-44), *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (drafted 1941-47), the three epic poems—*The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*—of *Trilogy* (composed 1942-44), *Majic Ring* (drafted 1943-44), and *The Writing on the Wall* (composed 1945), among other works.

CHAPTER 2: PSYCHIC-RESEARCH WORK IN *MAJIC RING*

*Sleepless nights,
I remember the initiates,
their gesture, their calm glance.
I have heard how in rapt thought,
in vision, they speak
with another race,
more beautiful, more intense than this.*
—H.D., “The Gift”

Throughout the war years, H.D. regularly attended or conducted spiritualist séances. “After our amazing experience in London, during the worst of the Blitz days,” she writes in December 1943, “I had a feeling that I would like to explore psychic matters” (*MR* 62). Though H.D. studied and syncretized a variety of heterodox and occult belief systems throughout her life and works without self-consciousness or irony, she expressed a certain skepticism toward mainstream or “popular” spiritualism, writing, “like most intellectual, well-informed people, I thought of the movement in general as being illiterate and a little low in tone” (62). With this, she writes that “very little acceptable writing has been done on the subject. . . very little has been done by modern poets or writers” (65).

The origins of popular spiritualism lie in the bedroom of two teenage girls in Hydesville, New York in 1848. Sisters Margaret and Kate Fox claimed to receive coded messages from the otherworld via table rappings; the spirit contacting them, they reported, was that of a murdered peddler whose remains were buried in the cellar of their home. News of the phenomenon hit the *New York Tribune* and then papers throughout North America and Europe; the Fox Sisters began hosting public

séances and psychical demonstrations. In *Ghostwriting Modernism*, Helen Sword summarizes how quickly spiritualism was absorbed into mainstream American and European culture as something “between a recreational pursuit and a quasi-religious belief,” despite the Fox Sisters’ claims being proven to be a hoax:

By the 1860s and 1870s, one could sit for spirit photographs, attend spirit lectures on a range of progressive social and religious issues, and take part in carefully orchestrated séances at which ghosts materialized, voices spoke through levitating trumpets, messages wrote themselves on sealed slates, and mediums’ bodies emitted disconcerting quantities of strange, filmy substance known as ectoplasm. (2)

At the *fin de siècle*, a wider variety of esoteric and primarily occult belief systems enchanted the masses and avant-garde in North America and Europe,⁴ best represented by the widespread Theosophical movement led by Russian émigrée Helena Blavatsky and the formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an elite order founded in 1887 and devoted to the study and practice of occultism, metaphysics, ritual magic and paranormal activity. Golden Dawn members included an array of famous writers: Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats, mystic A.E. Waite of the Rider-Waite tarot deck, Sherlock Holmes author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, British mystic-scholar Evelyn Underhill, Welsh writer Arthur Machen, and the infamous ceremonial magician and poet Aleister Crowley. During and following both World Wars, there was another resurgence of popular spiritualist activity, as individuals once again sought out mediums to

⁴ See Alex Owen’s *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004) for a thorough account of these years, referred to as the “mystical revival.”

reconnect them to their loved ones, whether soldier or civilian, lost amidst the violence of the wars.

H.D.'s dubiousness about popular spiritualism was informed by the movement's vexed history as a whimsical, fraudulent, and lucrative pursuit, as well as her inclination toward intellectual and spiritual elitism—as an occultist, H.D. considered herself an initiated heir of ancient esoteric wisdom, whereas spiritualism has long been characterized by its inherently democratic nature. As Sword writes, spiritualism “is accessible to anyone who can construct a homemade Ouija board or hire a storefront medium” (*GM* xi). This is to make the distinction that H.D.'s distrust of popular spiritualism was due to its poor repute as a mainstream movement, rather than a skepticism toward the belief system itself—on the contrary, H.D. never expressed disbelief in the survival of the soul beyond death or in séances as an authentic mode of affirming this notion. In this way, H.D. was unlike many modernist writers who practiced occultism or spiritualism. Yeats, for example, wrote *A Vision* in 1925, a work which chronicles spirit-messages received via trance mediumship sessions with his wife, but his attitude toward these practices was always “a mixture of skepticism and naïveté [that] is characteristic of occultists,” who tend to “dismiss their beliefs when challenged, and discuss them freely only with other believers,” writes Timothy Materer in *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (1). Pound was similar in this regard, wavering between credulity and ironic detachment, as was James Merrill, author of the postmodern epic *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the writing of which was informed by Merrill's

participation in Ouija board-based séances. Materer writes of H.D.'s rather un-modernist sincerity toward her practices:

Some modern poets. . . use [occult] doctrines without any obvious signs of irony. H.D.'s belief in astrological predictions and invocations of the dead seems unqualified and unshakeable. She felt no need to argue for the reality of what was so deeply real to her, even when her occult beliefs were challenged by Sigmund Freud himself. (2)⁵

H.D. nevertheless expressed disdain for what Yeats calls in *A Vision* the “low haunts” of popular spiritualism (Yeats 437). Thus, following the suggestion of her lover Bryher (born Annie Winifred Ellerman) that the London Society for Psychical Research was “established on a more intellectual basis”⁶—its members including Freud, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung, and French-Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson—H.D. subsequently attended one of the SPC's group meetings in 1941 and thus began her brief but intense period of spiritualist activity (*MR* 62).

The greatest insight we have into these years is through the recently published *Majic Ring* (2009), wherein H.D., in epistolary and journal form,

⁵ There is a single moment in *Majic Ring* where H.D. expresses “self-consciousness” about engaging in spiritualism, writing, “I did not know anyone on the psychic-research world and anyhow, I think that I was afraid that my own experience or my own philosophy would not stand up to the proddings of the inexpert; of the unilluminated” (82). However, I would again posit that this thinking is an obvious product of her occultism (given her notion of the “inexpert,” “unilluminated”) rather than any skepticism toward spiritualism itself as a belief system (as opposed to popular spiritualism as a mainstream movement).

⁶ Founded in 1882 and still in existence, The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) seeks to understand phenomena commonly labeled “psychic” or “paranormal,” describing itself as “the first society to conduct organised scholarly research into human experiences that challenge contemporary scientific models” (www.SPR.ac.uk).

chronicles her experiences in séances during 1943 and 1944, the same years she was at work on the latter two books (*Tribute to the Angels*, *The Flowering of the Rod*) of *Trilogy*. The letters and entries are based on séance notes H.D. kept during her “psychic-research” sessions with her “home circle” consisting of Bryher, the Eurasian medium Arthur Bhaduri and Arthur’s mother May Bhaduri. It was at her first SPC séance, or “circle,” that H.D. met Bhaduri around Christmastime in 1941 (66). On Friday evenings the group gathered in H.D.’s flat at a three-legged table once owned by H.D.’s “spiritual father”—as she called him—William Morris,⁷ a table that “danced with joy” and “in greeting as if very glad to have us again,” a table that “[stood] on one of its three little feet and [twirled] in a remarkably graceful and expressive way,” whose “table-antics [made] us laugh” (193, 52-3). In one journal entry, H.D. affirms the personal importance of her spiritualist activity during “the storm of most terrible outer circumstance (these war-years)”:

The dear Lord knows there is confusion enough everywhere. We approach our fifth Christmas of this war London. The thing that has meant most to me, in these last two years, has been this experience with [Bhaduri] and the work here. (64)

Majic Ring was initially exhumed from the significant oeuvre of unpublished H.D. texts by Sword with her 1995 essay “H.D.’s *Majic Ring*,” and in 2009 the work was edited by Pound scholar Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and subsequently published. The original text, Tryphonopoulos explains, exists in two copies: there is

⁷ See “H.D. by Delia Alton” (published in *The Iowa Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1986) for H.D.’s full account of how she came to acquire Morris’ table, which Bryher purchased for her at the posthumous estate sale of British novelist Violet Hunt (1866-1942). Tryphonopoulos provides excerpts of these passages in his footnotes to *Majic Ring* on pages 187-88 and 197.

a 274-page draft typescript which includes the carbons of H.D.'s original letters, and there is a second draft with some minor revisions, erasures, and insertions in H.D.'s hand. The most significant difference between the two texts is that in the second draft, from which the published *Majic Ring* is constructed, H.D. systematically crossed out and replaced all names with fictional ones: Hilda Aldington is changed to Delia Alton, Lord Dowding to Lord Howell, Arthur Bhaduri to Ben Manisi, May Bhaduri to Ada Manisi, Bryher to Garreth, and so on (ix-xi).⁸ The work is "by H.D. (writing as Delia Alton)," Delia Alton being H.D.'s psychical/spiritual alter-ego, the name under which she wrote six prose works in the 1940s and 50s. The title is a combination of the abbreviated form of her married name Aldington (after Richard Aldington) and a near-anagram of "Hilda," suggesting "dahlias, Delilas; ... she of Delos, i.e. Artemis," the Greek goddess (Friedman qtd. in *MR* 179).

Emphasizing H.D. as a war poet, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that Delia Alton was H.D.'s *nom de guerre*: "a *nom de plume* for a soldier, freedom fighter, or war journalist for whom a secret identity is necessary" (qtd. in *MR* 179). Of these occupations, H.D. as a war journalist is most fitting, I believe; of the raids, H.D. writes: "if my mind at those moments had one regret, it was that I might not be able to bear witness to this truth, I might be annihilated before I had time to bear witness": "*I John saw. / I testify*" (H.D. qtd. in Guest 254, *TA* 3.1, italics H.D.'s).

Part I of *Majic Ring* consists of a series of letters H.D. wrote to Air Chief Marshal Hugh Caswall Tremenheere Dowding, 1st Baron Dowding between

⁸ An additional note on the text of *Majic Ring*: Tryphonopoulos corrected some of H.D.'s presumably accidental misspellings and punctuation errors (H.D. often confused "its" and "it's") but retained, as do I, her underlining and italicizing of certain phrases for emphasis or to indicate quotation.

November 5 and December 12, 1943. Lord Dowding was Air Officer Commanding Royal Air Force Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, credited with playing a significant role in Britain's defense and thus the defeat of Hitler's plan to invade. As Guest writes, while Lord Dowding "to the public was a hero," to H.D., "he became an obsession. . . he was her war monument" (261). H.D. would go on to model the Greek hero Achilles of *Helen in Egypt* after Lord Dowding, and she would describe him as a paternal figure following the war: "to recall my father is to recall the cold, blazing intelligence of my 'last attachment' of the war years in London," H.D. writes (qtd. in Guest 261).⁹

What drew this unlikely pair together was the shared belief that life after death is an objective metaphysical truth. After unwillingly leaving the war in November 1940, Lord Dowding began lecturing and writing on spiritualism.¹⁰ H.D. first saw him speak on October 20, 1943 at Wigmore Hall in London where he spoke of communicating via spirit-messages with dead R.A.F. men (*MR xxxi*). Lord Dowding's interest in spiritualism was motivated by his pursuit of these "lost sons"—his own pilot son had been killed in combat, but so had many of his R.A.F. "boys," as he called them (61). Guest provides a useful summary of one of Lord

⁹ Lord Dowding was, early on, aware of H.D.'s idolatry and warned her of it: "I think you are in danger of idealizing a very normal human being," he writes to H.D. on November 15, 1943 (qtd. in *MR* 206).

¹⁰ During the Battle of Britain, Lord Dowding was criticized by Vice Marshal William Sholto Douglas, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, for not being aggressive enough in his tactics with the R.A.F. fighters, which followed, surely influenced by Winston Churchill's known dislike of Lord Dowding, with Douglas' removal of him as head of Fighter Command.

Dowding's psychical writings which elucidates his very specific, and specifically war-related, spiritualist beliefs:

Lord Dowding wrote a book, *Many Mansions* (1943), in which he cited occasions on which "lost" sons, that is, dead sons, had been contacted through mediums. These airmen, for they were not combat soldiers, were in middle ground between earth and astral space and were helping their comrades to their astral haven. . . . He lists example after example of these happy dead-only-to-the-world airmen who were living out their lives on another stratum. (261)

After seeing Lord Dowding lecture, H.D. wrote to him the very next day—October 21, 1943—inquiring as to whether or not she might participate in the séances of his "circle."¹¹ Lord Dowding responded to H.D. in two letters dated October 23 and 27, 1943, the second of which states: "If at any time I am impressed to form or enlarge a 'circle,' I will remember your name, but I know of no immediate probability of this" (qtd. in *MR* xxxi). Sword writes of Lord Dowding's letters to H.D. as "substantially identical; Dowding seems to have written the second without remembering that he had already sent the first, an indication that his correspondence with 'Dear Mrs. Aldington' probably meant a great deal less to him than to her" ("*H.D.'s Majic Ring*" 350). It is surprising in itself, as Guest notes, that Lord Dowding, a man of his rank and position, would respond to H.D. at all. H.D., "not deaf to his slight and profoundly hurt by his rejection" subsequently invited Bhaduri for a séance before which she had decided that if the sign of "wings or wing-

¹¹ This letter is not included in Part I of *Majic Ring*, which opens with H.D.'s third letter to Lord Dowding, dated November 5, 1943.

symbol” were to be communicated by spirits through Bhaduri, then it would be a “sort of ‘determinative’” that she should respond to Lord Dowding’s letter(s) (*MR* xxxi, 17). When the spirits passed on signs of a “falcon or hawk,” H.D. wrote back to Lord Dowding, and they began the correspondence that would make up Part I of *Majic Ring*.

In her letters to Lord Dowding, H.D. urgently relays spirit-messages reporting the arrival of a Viking ship, a “long dark ship with a sun-disk as figure-head and wings,” led by “Halbrith or Harald, our herald,” “the Angel or angelos, the messenger” (4, 13, 11). “Hal-brith,” it is reported, “manifests on the cusp of the ages as we are on the cusp, nearing but not yet crossing ‘the line’ that separates the Piscean from the Aquarian Age” (12). Thus the arrival of this ship indicated, to H.D., the imminent crossing over of the world into a new astrological age: “we are going or sailing into Aquarius, the House of Friends,” an age of harmony, resurrection, and man’s striving toward a spiritual existence, “out of the House of Enemies,” an age of worldwide aggression (22).¹²

H.D. informs Lord Dowding of these spiritual promises because she believes *he* is “the herald or Harald, the rune-maker, the angelos, the messenger” who is linked to the arrival of this new era of peace, if not the person who will realize it (12). In a series of associative, stream-of-consciousness passages, H.D. explains to Lord Dowding the reasoning for her convictions, which is largely rooted in the word

¹² In astrological theory, different astrological ages represent or parallel new cultural ages among the inhabitants of the earth. Though Pisces follows Aquarius in the zodiac wheel, astrological ages run backward (and cyclically), thus the Age of Aquarius follows the Age of Pisces. Scholars are still divided on whether or not the Age of Aquarius has yet to officially begin.

“nénufar” being relayed in combination with the Viking ship images, all of which she interprets using Egyptian theology, particularly the figure of Ra, the sky-god:

There is sun-disk on sail. In the centre of the disk, are two wings spread, not outside, but in the sun.

Now here, for a long time, I have thought of the RAF [sic] circle and crown with wings as a sort of sun-symbol. I mean, this came to me some time ago, before contacting you. Even the RA has its significance as the initials or the name of RA, the Egyptian “creator of gods, men, and the world.” I could not “do” with the F, so spelt it backwards and we get FAR. Anyhow, we have the historical RA and “the sun, emblem of life, light, and fertility” as the symbol. Also, he is “usually depicted as hawk-headed.” (15-16)

The symbol of *wings*, or a bird, of course, was H.D.’s “determinative” for Lord Dowding. So “because the Viking ship has [Dowding’s] wings, but IN the sun,” H.D. concludes that “the Vikings come obviously, as a symbol of [Dowding’s] pilots, [his] circle on the other side.” (16, 20). Predicting Lord Dowding’s skepticism, H.D. writes:

My R.A.F. and FAR might seem obvious and far-fetched but that NU should be the exact English transliteration of the Egyptian Hieroglyph for Sky-god and that the hieroglyph contains both the symbols used commonly for the sign of Aquarius, the wave-lines and the water-pot, can not be an “accident.” (22)

It is worth noting, of course, that Ra is a significant figure in the first book of *Trilogy*, written in the two years prior to H.D.’s communications with Lord Dowding, suggesting that H.D. was perhaps predisposed to receiving these spirit-messages in 1943:

Splintered in the crystal of identity,
shattered the vessel of integrity,

till the Lord *Amen*,
paw-er of the ground,

bearer of the curled horns,
bellows from the horizon :

here I am, Amen-Ra,
Amen, Aries, the Ram;

time, time for you to begin a new spiral, (*WDNF* 21.1-9)¹³

These spirit-messages thus led H.D. to believe that “we all of us [sic] (or the few in the fore-front [sic] of the battle) realize that this pattern”—of chaos, destruction—“has almost worn itself out,” and that peace was coming, perhaps in weeks (*MR* 12). H.D. would write of these years, “I really DID feel that a new heaven and a new earth were about to materialize,” indicating how imminent she believed was a “Second Coming” or worldly resurrection (qtd. in *Trilogy* 185):

It is next month, for it is nearly the next month, that is the next age or aeon or epoch, the age of Aquarius, the Water-man or the Angel who pours out power and grace, like the snow and the rain and the dew, on all who approach him, on all who desire to enter the House of Friends. (26)

H.D. writes the above *Majic Ring* passage, of course, on November 23, 1943—there are still years of war left. And Lord Dowding would eventually write to H.D. in

¹³ In “H.D.’s *Majic Ring*,” Helen Sword suggests that H.D. was perhaps also predisposed to allegedly receive messages regarding dead R.A.F. pilots, as H.D. claims to have had a “ghostly encounter” with a R.A.F. pilot a year after the Battle of Britain—“this was an actual experience,” H.D. would later write of the event—as recorded in her poem “R.A.F.” dated September 17, 1941 (350, H.D. qtd. in Sword 350)

1945: “I think you not ought to assume that ‘I’ was in the Viking ship. I may perhaps have been there, but I don’t think I was Harald,” and that, of her alleged spirit-messages from R.A.F. pilots in 1946, he “[doesn’t] know who Charles is, or Roland, or John, or anyone but the whole tome is trivial and uninspiring” (qtd. in *MR* 192, xxxii). But in these earlier years of war, H.D.’s experiences in séances affirm her cardinal belief in the survival of the soul beyond physical death—moreover, the capacity for language itself to transcend the conventional physical distinctions of life and death—and instill in her the promise of imminent peace that thus signifies the capacity for spiritual resurrection both on an individual and worldly basis:

On October 8th [1943], I was given this message or telegram from the table; “test of wonderful value. Turning point near. Time to resurrect. Hope re-born. Peace.” I now associate this “test” with Manisi’s “reading.” (*MR* 16)

CHAPTER 3: *TRILOGY'S* INVOCATIONS

*You see, I called on Amen during the raids; when the bombs fell, I said Amen,
Amen, Amen over and over. It became almost a sort of—madness—it went on
and on, Amen, Amen, Amen.*

—H.D., *Majic Ring*

Before venturing back into the war-torn landscape of *Trilogy*, it is useful to first clarify how H.D. conceives time, as this is the foundation on which her notion of resurrection depends. Clarifying her conception illuminates why the narrative structure of *Trilogy* is non-linear, moving, between the first and third book, from the Blitz of the 1940s back in time to the “beginning,” or the nativity of Christ. H.D., I believe, understood historical time as both cyclical and teleological: historical events repeat themselves and always reveal

a tale of a Fisherman,
a tale of a jar or jars,

the same—different—the same attributes,
different yet the same as before (*TA* 39.21-24)

yet history is also moving toward a definitive end point which is simultaneously a Second Coming or resurrection. Thus I would argue H.D. conceives of time as a spiral or helix. On one hand, H.D.’s conception of time suggests her synthesis of both the cyclical thinking of astrological theory and the teleological thinking of Christianity; on the other, such ideas about time saturated the air among modernist writers. Pound had his theory of the vortex, which perhaps influenced H.D., and Yeats conceives history as a gyre in his famous 1919 poem “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand. (1-4, 9-10)

The thinking of these modernists is a reaction to the conditions of modernity: history had repeated itself when a second war had closely followed the “war to end all wars,” yet it simultaneously seemed to be rapidly advancing in technological innovation under capitalism and hurtling toward a violent self-induced end via modern warfare and the advent of nuclear power. This thinking also, however, explains why H.D. asserts throughout *Trilogy* that history is, in its entirety, both repeating itself *and* coming to an end point which is also a new beginning, a resurrection, the Age of Aquarius: “time, time for you to begin a new spiral” (*WDNF* 21.1-9).

As stated in the introduction, *Trilogy* does not contain “conventional” references to spiritualism (table-rapping, Ouija boards), but the narrative is suffused with invocations of and communications with the un/dead and spirits or spiritual figures. At the beginning of the epic, the speaker, recalling Agamben, focuses on the recovery of the capacity for language as central to the recovery of humanity and dignity for the raid survivors. The poet-speaker commands in *The Walls Do Not Fall*:

Let us, however, recover the Sceptre,
 the rod of power :

it is crowned with the lily-head
 or the lily-bud :

it is Caduceus; among the dying
it bears healing :

or evoking the dead,
it brings life to the living. (*WDNF* 3.1-8)

In this section, the speaker invokes the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian messenger gods (Hermes, Mercury, and Thoth, respectively) for aid. She begins with Hermes, who, in Greek mythology, moves freely between the worlds of the living and dead and acts as a psychopomp (from the Greek *psychopompós*, literally meaning the "guide of souls"), or a conductor for the dead attempting to reach the afterlife. The speaker makes an imperative that speaks to and for the nameless collective: "let us"—the un/dead, *speechless* survivors of the raids—"recover the Sceptre," or the rod carried by Hermes, the "Caduceus" "crowned" with a floral symbol of resurrection (the lily). H.D. argues here the capacity for the survivors themselves to self-guide through the "underworld" of London's ruins by *recovering* their tools for writing, linking the capacity for language to one's capacity for resurrection. She juxtaposes Hermes' "rod of power," against the "Sword" of war, likening the rod to a transcendent, immortal, life-giving writing tool associated with the original act of creation versus the current climate of destruction (*WDNF* 10.1). "Thoth, Hermes, the stylus, / the palette, the pen, the quill endure," H.D. writes:

... 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. (*WDNF* 10.1-2, 17.5-16, italics H.D.'s)

In the above verses, the survivors' "recovery of the Sceptre," seems, in a sense, to render them writer-poets, as H.D. continues to use a collective "we" and "us" as she goes on to address the role of the poet under fascism and during war, her use of collective pronouns gesturing to the way in which mass mechanized violence pillaged individuals of stable, singular identities. Just as H.D. understood her spiritualist activities as "psychic-research *work*," so she conceives the role of poets and writers during the war as urgent and relevant, rather than merely providing "trivial / intellectual adornment" (*WDNF* 8.5). "You now tell us," she writes,

poets are useless,

more than that,
we, authentic relic,

bearers of the secret wisdom,
living remnant

of the inner band
of the sanctuaries' initiate,

are not only 'non-utilitarian',
we are 'pathetic' :

this is the new heresy;
but if you do not even understand what words say,

how can you expect to pass
judgement on what words conceal? (*WDNF* 8.6-17)

H.D. directly address the destructive instrumentalist thinking of Nazism in opposition to the thinking of poets, who, "dragging" forward "the forlorn / husk of the self," a "dead shell," "have no part in // new-world reconstruction, / in the

confederacy of labour, // . . . and the cataloguing of utilities” (*WDNF* 14.16-20). As Bryher writes in a letter to Mary Herr in 1940, “fascism as always [means] the subordination of everything to war—war and then plunder” (qtd. in Guest 258). This “subordination” manifests partly in the form of a “stylus . . . dipped in corrosive sublimate,” or the annihilation of individual and collective tradition and history through the fiery destruction wrought by the Blitz and the Nazi book burning campaign (*WDNF* 2.25):

though our books are a floor
of smouldering ash under our feet;

though the burning of the books remains
the most perverse gesture

and the meanest
of man’s mean nature,

yet give us, they still cry,
give us books; (*WDNF* 9.3-10)

At this “cross-roads” of the “world’s burning,” the speaker proposes that “the Holy Ghost” acts as “go-between, interpreter” who “explains symbols of the past / in today’s imagery,” merging “distant future / with most distant antiquity” (*WDNF* 20.2-12). Among the ruins are “personified messengers,” or Hermes, Mercury, and Thoth, the “healers, helpers, / of the One, *Amen*, All-father” who “we draw . . . nearer” through “prayer, spell, / litany, incantation” (*WDNF* 24.20-22).

The fight in *The Walls Do Not Fall* is not simply to recover the capacity for language and thereby individual humanity, but to then “scrape a palette, / point pen or brush, // prepare papyrus or parchment”—(re-)create—through the “[re-dedication of] our gifts / to spiritual realism” and the “search for historical parallels,

/ research into psychic affinities" (*WDNF* 35.5-6, 35.3-4, 38.1-2). H.D. expands upon this imperative in the following section of *Trilogy*, titled *Tribute to the Angels*, appropriating the language and methods of the medieval chemistry of alchemy as a metaphor for transforming the wreckage of modernity through and into poetry. As T.S. Eliot famously writes in "The Waste Land" (1922), "these fragments I have shored against my ruins," so H.D. commands (Eliot 431):

take what the old-church
found in Mithra's tomb,

candle and script and bell,
take what the new-church spat upon

and broke and shattered;
collect the fragments of the splintered glass

and of your fire and breathe,
melt down and integrate,

re-invoke, re-create
opal, onyx, obsidian,

now shattered in the shards
men tread upon. (*TA* 1.9-20)

In this section the speaker "[invokes] the true-magic" of Hermes Trismegistus, "patron of alchemists," for her task which is oriented toward re-invoking, re-creating, and "[re-lighting] the flame" of the redemptive and regenerative motherly figure (*WDNF* 35.13, *TA* 12.1). As Susan Gubar writes, emphasizing the association between alchemical art and fire, H.D. here attempts to metabolize and reclaim the ruination of the Blitz: "even the destructive lightning and bombs can now be

associated with melting that fuses a new unity, heat that transforms the content of the dross in the alchemist's bowl into the philosopher's stone" (207-8):

Now polish the crucible
and in the bowl distill

a word most bitter, *marah*,
a word bitterer still, *mar*,

sea, brine, breaker, seducer,
giver of life, giver of tears;

Now polish the crucible
and set the jet 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. (TA 8.1-14)

Through this transformation—part lyrical alchemy, part spiritual invocation—H.D. can then realize her central vision of “The Lady,” who is a synthesis of all holy women and goddesses: the Virgin Mary, Venus, Isis, Astarte, Aphrodite, the *Sanctus Spiritus*. The speaker, emphasizing the un/dead state of the survivors, states that “like a ghost, / we entered a house through a wall” to see her, the “Invisible, indivisible Spirit” who appeared to H.D. at a séance in 1943 and who the poet felt “belonged to” Lord Dowding (TA 20.7-8, 20.1):

I looked at my Lady and she was a white statue, but she was not a statue, she was not white stone. I thought of snow, of rock, I thought, she is like a snow-

queen. She was a queen, she had a high crown, delicate as frost; she was alive, she was not-alive, she certainly was alive, she did not move but she could move. There she stood. She might have been dredged from the Aegean or she might have stood in a niche in Chartres Cathedral, but she was not Greek. . . .

She was exactly some Lady out of a fairy-tale, she was the snow-queen certainly. Yes, she was snow and cloud-queen and she was from the north and she belonged to [Lord Dowding]. (*MR* 55)

H.D. writes in *Trilogy* that “You find her everywhere (or did find), // in cathedral, museum, cloister, / at the turn of the palace stair,” “Our Lady of the Snow” dressed in “veils . . . *white as snow*” (*TA* 29.36-38, 31.12, 32.2, italics H.D.’s). Though “she is not-fear, / she is not-war,” she “is no symbolic figure // of peace, charity, chastity, goodness, / faith, hope reward;” rather, she is the “new Eve who comes clearly to return, to retrieve what she lost,” carrying “not / the tome of ancient wisdom” but “an unwritten volume of the new,” “whose book is our book” yet to be written (*TA* 39.5-8). The last poem of *Tribute to the Angels* closes:

*This is the flowering of the rod,
this is the flowering of the burnt-out wood,*

*where Zadkiel, we pause to give
thanks that we rise again from death and live.*

London
May 17-31, 1944. (*TA* 43.23-28, italics H.D.’s)

The “flowering of the rod” is a symbol of resurrection through language and writing, referring both back to the “recovered” Caduceus of Hermes, which aids in guidance toward the afterlife, and also the flowering of the cross of rods in the New

Testament which symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus, the capacity for life after death—which, significantly, H.D. proposes is also possible on a spiritual level for the collective “we” of the raid survivors. H.D.’s final time-stamp on the second book, revealing that the poems were written in fourteen days, is the mark of a survivor for whom the war—in this post-Blitz moment, marked by the Allies attempting to make progress against Nazi Germany—was an inescapable reality. *Tribute to the Angels* is thus “a sort of premature peace poem,” in H.D.’s words, written during the “wonderful pause just before D-Day,” which would arrive in a week (qtd. in Gelpi 295).

Thus the third book of *Trilogy*, titled *The Flowering of the Rod*, is H.D.’s final attempt to realize spiritual resurrection. The series of poems is a return to the beginning, a rewriting of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus focused on the purchasing of the alabaster jar of myrrh by Mary Magdalene, “the first to actually witness His life-after-death” (*FR* 12.6). For this reason, critical readings of this book tend to overlook H.D.’s signaling in the opening poem that the war remains a present, pressing reality, that still “the geometry of perfection,” the swastika, on “the terrible banner // darkens the bridge-head” (*FR* 1.14-17). So H.D. writes:

we have shown

that we could stand;
we have withstood

the anger, frustration,
bitter fire of destruction;

leave the smouldering cities below
(we have done all we could) ,

.....

now having given all, let us leave all;
above all, let us leave pity

and mount higher
to love—resurrection. (*FR* 1.25-30)

The third book of *Trilogy* asserts the immediate relevance of the oldest story of physical death and spiritual resurrection, that of Christ's death and life after death. To "mount higher" toward resurrection is to "leave / The-place-of-a-skull," both the contemporary site of war devastation and the site of His death (Calvary or Golgotha, the site of the crucifixion, is translated in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as "the place of [the] skull") (*FR* 2.17). Recalling H.D.'s linguistic alchemy in the previous book—*mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary*—the central symbol of these poems is *myrrh*, a resin used in religious rituals, for embalming, and as an aphrodisiac, representing both immortality and resurrection, as well as those characteristics in Christ. In H.D.'s words, myrrh is a symbol of both "a coronation and a funeral—a double affair," "the double ceremony, a funeral and a throning" (*FR* 13.8, 13.10). As the poet writes in the closing paragraph of the final letter to Lord Dowding included in *Majic Ring*, "the end is as the beginning" (57). Thus, the end of *Trilogy* returns to the "beginning," the birth of Christ.

As the story goes, "there is no room at the Inn," so they "entered the ox-stall," Balthasar with "the spikenard, / Melchior, the ring of gold," and Kaspar with the jar of myrrh (*FR* 42.16, 21, 5-6). H.D.'s final poem reads:

But she spoke so he looked at her,
she was shy and simple and young;

she said, Sir, it is a most beautiful fragrance,
as of all flowering things together;

but Kaspar knew the seal of the jar was unbroken.
he did not know whether she knew

the fragrance came from the bundle of myrrh
she held in her arms.

London

December 18-31, 1944. (*FR* 43.1-10)

“The bundle of myrrh,” of course, is the baby Jesus. From him comes the “fragrance” of “all things coming together,” or resurrection; as H.D. writes in an earlier poem, “resurrection is remuneration, // food, shelter, fragrance / of myrrh and balm” (*FR* 7.6-8). He is, to draw from an earlier poem, “a lily, if you will, / each petal, a kingdom, an aeon”:

it is the seed of a lily
that having flowered,

will flower again;
it is the smallest grain,

the least of all seeds
that grows branches

where the birds rest;
it is that flowering balm,

it is heal-all,
everlasting; (*FR* 10.19-32)

I would argue first that H.D.’s return to the *beginning*—the birth of Christ—in the final poem of *Trilogy* is in part a subversive protective measure. It offers a resistance to conventional narrative structure and to time, the passing of which certainly seemed irrationally accentuated under modernity and proved to H.D. to

annihilate individual and cultural narratives. It is a resistance to the notion of an ending, an attempt to write beyond or outside of what felt like the end of the world, history, and memory. The work, in its cyclicity—returning to the “ground zero” of the Nativity which resembles the “ground zero” of bombed London wherein the work opens—encloses itself from time like the sea-shell of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, “hewn from within by that craftsman / the shell-fish,” which, against the sea thrust, “senses the finite, / . . . limits its orbit,” becoming immortal:

I sense my own limit,
my shell-jaws snap shut

at invasion of the limitless,
ocean-weight; infinite water

can not crack me, egg in egg-shell;
closed in, complete, immortal

full-circle (*WDNF* 4.23-29)

At the same time, H.D. returns to the birth of Christ at the end of *Trilogy* not only because it is the Christian story of resurrection, but also because Christ’s birth signified the beginning of the astrological age of Pisces, and H.D. believed that the new Age of Aquarius was imminent based on the spirit-messages received in her séances. This makes the final signature on these poems, “London / December 18-31, 1944,” significant beyond its being the mark of a civilian war survivor, as she finished *The Flowering of the Rod* on the eve of a new year, a new age of prospective peace, perhaps the dawning of a Second Coming. Thus the final book of *Trilogy* is an attempt at the closure of and reconciliation with the end of the age of Pisces—the age of war—by returning to its beginning, thereby christening the world to receive a

new astrological phase that might realize peace, resurrection. As H.D. writes in *Majic Ring*:

[The Lord] has led us for nearly 2000 years, through temporary pasture-land but always (from one stretch of pasture to the next) the human race has been led through a valley of the shadow. It must be the pattern of this age, the Pisces-age, the House of Enemies. We can not explain man's progression and retrogression, otherwise. But we all of us (or we few in the fore-front of the battle) realize that this pattern has almost worn itself out. It is of the Pisces-age, the Fish or sea-age. And from this fish-age or sea or ocean-age, comes the Viking ship with the herald or Harald, the run-maker, the angelos, the messenger with his "genial, lovely smile." (12)

CONCLUSION

*I have gone forward,
I have gone backward,
—H.D., *The Walls Do Not Fall**

I have provided a new reading of *Trilogy* which places the epic within the context of H.D.'s life during the time of its writing—the spiritualist séances held in her home and the war which raged outside it—without performing a wholly psychological or autobiographical reading of the text. My primary interest has been in illustrating how H.D.'s wartime foray into spiritualism shaped her impulse to invoke the dead throughout *Trilogy*, whether by calling upon the un/dead civilian survivors of the raids or upon ancient “dead” religious and mythical figures, as well as the visionary optimism she expresses in her depiction of the capacity for spiritual resurrection on both an individual and worldly basis.

I have argued that H.D.'s spiritualism was a significant personal, poetic, and spiritual pursuit and in part a reaction to the culture of death surrounding her via the Blitz and war, rather than séances merely “[serving] as a source-book for H.D. . . . a testing ground for H.D.'s imagination and occult speculation,” as Tryphonopoulos argues (*MR* xxv, xxvii). As I discussed in my introduction, scholars consistently neglect to discuss the influence of H.D.'s spiritualist activities on her works in favor of theorizing about her occultism. In Chapter One, I quoted H.D.'s writing that “the thing that . . . meant the most to [her]” during the early years of the war was her experiences in séances, but H.D. also writes in *Majic Ring* that “maybe, [her] whole urge toward self-expression has led [her] to this point,” to a “philosophy” that “this

communing or rather clearly communicating with the other world has intrigued the human mind and emotions from the earliest days” (65, 226). That H.D. should articulate her spiritualist practices as resulting in the philosophical culmination of her “whole urge toward self-expression” speaks to how significant and serious of a pursuit these activities were and thus that they should be prioritized in critical readings of H.D.’s later works.

There is a tendency among many H.D. scholars to present the poet and her texts as entirely transcendent, forgoing the material and political in pursuit or portrayal of the mystical and mythical. In response to this propensity I have illustrated how deeply embedded H.D. was in the reality of the war and how this inescapable reality affected the writing of *Trilogy*. It is significant and telling that H.D. could have left London during the Blitz, having viable havens in both America and Switzerland, and chose not to. The poet, within a small flat enclosed by black curtains and as fires flooded the city streets beyond, felt that she “might be annihilated” at any moment and thus had to “bear witness to this truth” (qtd. in Guest 254). My conclusion is that spiritualism offered H.D. a mode of reconciling both her desire to transcend reality and to *bear witness* to it; it was a spiritual pursuit which was oriented toward and invoked the transcendent otherworld, yet as a mode of communication it was rooted in the material: a table, a “gold coast” zodiac ring, a crystal ball, a letter from Lord Dowding, a group of people.

It is worth noting that my engagement with *Majic Ring* was primarily focused on Part I of the work—the Lord Dowding letters—though I drew information and excerpts from the early journal entries of Part II. This is because I have been

interested in how H.D.'s communications with Lord Dowding contributed to the visionary optimism of H.D. and *Trilogy* during the war years, and Part II of *Majic Ring* is largely H.D.'s extended meditation on the visionary experiences she had in Greece in the 1920s.¹⁴ Further studies on *Majic Ring* and *Trilogy* might make use of the archived letters *from* Lord Dowding to H.D., which are not included in *Majic Ring*. For the sake of setting boundaries on my study, I have not discussed here H.D.'s work *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, composed in 1947 and published in 2007, which is a fictionalized and aestheticized account of same events covered in *Majic Ring*. Given the recent publication of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, there is yet ample room for scholarship on how the work contributes to our understandings of *Majic Ring* and *Trilogy*, as well as H.D.'s wartime and post-war psyche and spiritual interests. Other works which could serve to further illuminate H.D.'s thinking and writing of these years include the *Hirslanden Notebooks* (composed 1947-1949, published 2015) and *H.D. by Delia Alton* (composed 1949-1950, published 1986).

Majic Ring ultimately serves as a prose companion piece to the epic *Trilogy*. Specifically, I would classify H.D.'s epic as exoteric—oriented beyond itself, toward the world—and *Majic Ring* as esoteric—oriented within—in part due to the latter being an epistolary and diaristic work. My belief here is partly rooted in a passage from the second journal entry of *Majic Ring* in which H.D. writes of her séance circle:

Our work, I presume, is strictly speaking, esoteric. . . . We four are working, to the best of our ability within, you might say the wheel, in one of the smaller circles, for the circles become smaller as they approach the centre. Our work

¹⁴ Helen Sword's "H.D.'s *Majic Ring*" offers a reading of how H.D.'s experiences in Greece provided source material for *Trilogy*.

has been conditioned, as all group-work is, to our particular status, our degree of development, our temperaments and our aims or ambitions. (64, underlining H.D.'s)

H.D. writes that the “aim” of the séances was “not. . . fundamentally to help anyone,” and by extension one can conclude that *Majic Ring* is also not overtly oriented toward “helping” people (64, underlining H.D.'s). Rather, the text is a record of a series of experiences in H.D.'s wartime life, and therefore its virtue is revealed via its use in intertextual readings of H.D.'s late poetic oeuvre. *Trilogy*, alternatively and as illustrated above, is a poetic “call to action” oriented toward a self-destructing world. Read alongside one another, the works illuminate the origins and nature of H.D.'s lucid and unified vision of worldly spiritual resurrection out of the war years.

Like the gods of *Trilogy* which “face two-ways” and the work's own narrative structure, resurrection is a process oriented backward and forward, toward both life and death (*WDNF* 2.13). In attempting resurrection, the recreation of life, one must first face death itself. Threatened by death all around her, H.D., through her séances and her writing, confronted it directly. This recalls what American poet and essayist Mary Ruefle calls *literacy of death*: writing, she states, is “self-consciousness in dialogue with its opposite, the absence of consciousness” (171). To write, H.D. illustrates, is to consent to language and thus to death, to what is ultimately fated.

Fate—God sends this as a mark,
 a last token that we are not forgot,
 lost in this turmoil,
 about to be crushed out,
 burned or stamped out
 at best with sudden death (H.D., “Prisoners” 10-15)

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