

# H. D.'s Palimpsest: The Work of the "Advance-Guard" in a History of Trauma

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Yes. Raymonde had (the recurrent miracle) come somehow through. Going on and on and on. *Who fished the murex up?* She would re-type the poems and send them to Johnstone on the *Bi-monthly*. He had asked her for poems, but probably he wouldn't like them. Not abstract enough. Not clarid nor concise enough. Perhaps she could rework them.

--H. D., *Palimpsest* (166)

The personal and public trauma of the First World War led H. D. to question the role of avant-garde art and the efficacy of the "clarid" and "concise" imagist poem. H. D.'s novel *Palimpsest* (1926) stages the poet's doubts in the postwar period, reframes the prewar avant-garde, and itself posits a kind of art that might allow the writer to formulate an ethical standpoint.<sup>1</sup> Despite excellent analyses of H. D.'s prose work in the last several decades by scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Adalaid Morris, H. D. continues to be known as the founding poet of imagism, a characterization that has endured ever since 1912 when Ezra Pound transformed the American Hilda Doolittle into the expatriate poet H. D.<sup>2</sup> In the face of this legacy, it is important to note that in the 1920s H. D. turned from the lyric poetry of imagism to lyric narrative in prose as a strategy better suited to capturing the modernist moment.

H. D.'s interwar prose has been criticized for turning away from contingent history toward the timeless aesthetics of lyric (abstract, clarid, concise), notably in early work by Douglas Bush and recent autobiographical studies. However, *Palimpsest*, like much of H. D.'s prose, takes as its subject the limits of aesthetic solipsism, questioning the cultural role of the avant-garde in the wake of World War. The central story of the three-part *Palimpsest*, "Murex: War and Postwar London (circa A.D.

1916-1926),” particularly deserves reexamination as a text about the work of art in understanding one’s relation to history and the effects of trauma. Echoing the stories that come before and after (the first set in the Roman Empire and the third in modern Egypt), “Murex” depicts Raymonde Ransome finally confronting the repressed trauma of the First World War and reclaiming her identity as a poet. In contrast to autobiographical readings which view “Murex”’s conclusion as H. D.’s affirmation of imagism in the postwar world, I argue that we must read it as advocating a surrender of the imagist poem in favor of lyric narrative composed in a “cinematographic” mode.<sup>3</sup>

In the cinematographic mode, as H. D.’s Raymonde conceives it, the poet sees history arranged in layers, like celluloid on a film’s reel. The light of antiquity burns through these layers, projecting particular moments of the past onto an illuminated present. As Deborah Kelly Kloefer has suggested, this light of antiquity, a “blue” flame, is not nostalgia for a lost Greek ideal (188). Rather, “Murex”’s image of the poet as history’s cinematograph links this light with a need to understand relations between past and present, relations between self and other, between fictions and personal systems of beliefs. “Murex” implies that an artist employing a cinematographic mode could illuminate the basis of war and postwar moments in history, ethics, and myth. Psychoanalysis, a combination of science and art that grew up alongside the cinema, similarly refracts the subject’s location in a network of discourses. Indeed, H. D. identifies Raymonde’s role as history’s cinematograph with the role she would later call “the poet-psycho-analyst” (*Analyzing Freud* 11).<sup>4</sup>

In calling into question an aesthetic modernism, one more concerned with *art pour l’art* than with ethics and politics, H. D. turns in “Murex” to the new science of psychoanalysis and the new reproducing technology of the cinematograph because they have the potential to inoculate a culture against the “destructiveness of war” (Benjamin 242). This essay examines how the palimpsest of “Murex” integrates Sigmund Freud’s mapping of the “psychic apparatus” (*Beyond* 81) (specifically his use of the metaphor of the palimpsest for the layers of the unconscious and conscious mind in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925)) with the story of Raymond’s confrontation with a history of trauma. The essay also examines how “Murex” not only posits, but also enacts a cinematographic mode in its unique structure—a palimpsest layering of intertexts—to portray the poet’s mind at work in facing the trauma of her past and then composing a poem.

Psychoanalysis and cinema, which opened new ways of seeing, led H. D. to a poetic prose that could map a specifically postwar moment and challenge orthodoxies of aesthetic modernism as well as modernism’s avant-gardes. Even so, “Murex” ultimately marks the crossroads, or im-

passee, that artists such as Raymonde faced in the late twenties. Considered in the context of transatlantic modernism, Peter Bürger's original formulation for the avant-garde provides a frame for understanding the two different directions Raymonde contemplates for her own future role as a modernist artist: an aestheticist modernism (that tends toward organicity and autonomy) and an avant-garde modernism (that works to revolutionize the traditional concept of art as an institution, and that seeks to reorganize "the praxis of life through art") (56, 46). Raymonde, whose imagist poetry before the war might be identified with the former, seems to contemplate a break toward the latter after experiencing the traumas of WWI. Pressured to choose between aesthetic and avant-garde modernism, H. D.'s text offers the methods of psychoanalysis and cinema as a new means to acknowledge and respond to postwar demands for a more politically, ethically engaged art.

Of course, such weighty imperatives would be stillborn without an audience. The deftness of "Murex" lies in its weave of narrative and lyric, the appeal of its implied author (often near and yet critically distant from the poet-character of "Murex"), and its evocation of texts that could provide familiar ground for the reader. But who read *Palimpsest*? In a planned introduction to the novel, Robert McAlmon confronts the specter of elitism that haunts H. D.'s work, arguing that while H. D.'s work is "high-bred," it is "high-bred towards an end" (243). As H. D. herself later acknowledged, the avant-garde aspects of the novel are difficult (*Tribute* 148); indeed, McAlmon's introduction is entitled "Forewarned as regards H D's Prose." On the one hand, this difficulty is necessary to overcome the stagnation of the "pattern-minded types" who dictate taste in Britain and America and who enforce a duty to "carry on the tradition" (McAlmon 243). On the other hand, H. D. does temper the intricacy of her prose; readers unable to make it through Gertrude Stein's lyrical prose in *The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress* (published in 1925, also by McAlmon's Contact Editions) would find some handrails in H. D.'s lyric narrative. This is not to suggest that *Palimpsest* was received by or aimed at a popular audience; its "Popularity" is relative (Browning's poem of that title provides the epigraph and title of "Murex").<sup>5</sup> Tempering avant-garde lyricism with narrative context, *Palimpsest* aimed for an audience attuned to modernism's avant-gardes as well as for an expansion of that audience. Considering H. D.'s efforts to reach a wider audience, "Murex"'s portrayal of the poet's meditations on the paradox of elitism and efficacy is of particular interest.

H. D.'s stakes in publishing *Palimpsest* were high, personally and publicly. The text portrays the poet's struggle to face her wartime traumas and to formulate ethical "laws of song" (150). This imperative promises to alter the martial trajectory of history through art. If H. D.'s text is to suc-

ceed where her protagonist hesitates, it must appeal to the public while creating an art that challenges the status quo; the writer must get the “salt” back into a stale art that allowed so many die in the war (155). However, it was H. D. as “Imagiste” that the public seemed to want.<sup>6</sup> Relinquishing her “Imagiste” identity, yet reluctant to founder on the popular marketplace, H. D.’s “Murex” both identifies with a tradition of advance-guard intellectuals (Botticelli, Browning, and Joyce) and attempts to circumvent the potential for such a tradition to get stuck in a solipsistic dead-end. Although her poet-character claims a redemptive role for avant-garde aesthetics, H. D. problematizes an unquestioned canon as well as the intellectual elite—such as Raymonde—who romanticize the duty to “carry on, carry on, carry on” an avant-garde aesthetic (*Palimpsest* 137).

Turning to lyric narrative and the model of the palimpsest, H. D. found a means to map, although perhaps not escape, these formal, ethical, and political difficulties. Spatially, narrative has been charted as horizontal: it is concerned with telling a story, one that moves from exposition, complication, to resolution. In contrast, lyric has been mapped as vertical; in the lyric or poetic mode, progressing time is subordinate to expression (time is transcended, frozen, or subverted), and the reader suspends judgment in the immediacy of lyric.<sup>7</sup> In lyric narrative, then, the narrative progression is driven less by plot, the unfolding of a story over time, than by our interest in contemplating the vertical departures of lyric, as in the “Overture” of Proust’s *Swann’s Way*. In H. D.’s *Palimpsest*, reading hardly follows a linear horizontal, as its epigraph definition of a palimpsest suggests: “a parchment from which one writing has been erased to make room for another” (1). Rather, we are led to read back and forth, on multiple levels: between memory and the present moment, between internal discourse and the poem as Raymonde writes it, between Raymonde’s evocation of intertexts and the reader’s experience of those texts, between “Murex” and its echoes in the stories that precede and follow it, between the postwar moment of “Murex” and postwar moment of the reader.

In reading back and forth between *Palimpsest*’s triptych of stories, readers discover resonant echoes, despite the seemingly very different cities and times (from Rome circa 75 BC, to London circa 1926 AD, to Luxor, Egypt circa 1925 AD; H. D. is nothing if not thorough). In addition to shared themes and images, each story features a woman writer contemplating her past or potential involvement in a triangle of lovers as well as her work as an intellectual, attempting to “hold balanced, two exactly shaped, exactly weighted, yet mysteriously exactly antagonistic worlds” (176). Whereas the first and third stories are more conventionally narrative, driven by the complications of triangulated relationships and the plot’s action, “Murex” delves deeply into the protagonist’s ambivalence regarding her “work” and its relation to history, ethics, and aesthetics. A short summary reveals

that the simplicity, or perhaps banality, of the plot facilitates a vertical, lyric emphasis. Readers are introduced to Raymonde's mental drift and solitude in the cave-like recesses of her London flat one late afternoon. This limbo state, a "cocoon-blur of not-thinking" (96), is interrupted by her friend Marion's phone call explaining that the twenty-nine year old Ermentrude Solomon wants to see her; a second immediate call follows from Ermy requesting a visit; a brief period of waiting and reluctance precedes Ermy's visit; Raymonde and Ermy have tea and converse. After Ermy departs, Raymonde meditates in the twilight in the chair Ermy has left, and Raymonde writes a poem, deciding finally to go to Cret-d'y-Vau where she "can get some work done" (138).

The instability of the story seems initially to be a question of Raymonde's relationship to Ermy: how will the more experienced woman help or refuse to help Ermy? Ermy has been sent to Raymonde by their mutual friend Marion on the pretense of getting written introductions to people in Florence, to which Ermy is about to escape. Over the course of Marion's and Ermy's phone calls, we learn that Ermy's husband (Martin, a poet) has been lured into an affair by their friend Mavis Landour, and Ermy has learned (from Marion and Mavis) that Mavis had an affair with Raymonde's (now absent) husband Freddie (a poet made soldier) ten years ago. However, both the narrator and Raymonde seem bored by this melodramatic web of intrigue, which indeed remains off-stage. As Raymonde's past is increasingly revealed to the reader, a different tension develops as the driving force of the narrative progression: will Raymonde awaken to the trauma of her past and thus the possibility of the (re)emergence of a powerful creative identity?

In the first half of the story, the reader's interest is in following Raymonde's descent through the layers of her unconscious and the ascent of her creative powers. H. D. uses a pattern of theme, repetition, and variation throughout to depict Raymonde's psychic fugue state.<sup>8</sup> In the first half, her psychic fugue is an attempt to maintain a state of not-remembering traumas attendant upon the Great War. These traumas include a stillborn baby, the shell shock of her husband and his betrayal with her friend Mavis, as well as the complicity of women and the failures of art which allowed the war to go on. They are signified throughout the text by the phrase, "feet, feet, feet, feet," which alludes to the sounds of soldiers passing up London's Sloane Street during her near-fatal experience of childbirth. The progression of story-time and Raymonde's conversation with Ermy is subordinate to Raymonde tearing through her self-imposed mental fog to finally process events repressed for ten years. As I will examine further, her drive to unearth and face this buried past is triggered by images and phrases which Ermy brings to her during their conversation. When Ermy departs, the pattern of recurring theme and variation con-

tinues; however, in the second half of the story H. D.'s fugue writing depicts Raymonde's creative process as she composes a poem. Raymonde's thoughts are given in prose paragraphs juxtaposed with the italicized, offset lines of the poem as she composes it. Here, the reader's interest is in the dialectic of the work of art and its social context.

Therefore, my analysis progresses by the intertexts that structure Raymonde's psychic fugues—the first being the recovery of the traumatic moment, the second being the composition of that past and present into a poem. The intertexts of "Murex" can be categorized as, on the one hand, references that point to the presence of the implied author, such as allusions to the other two stories in *Palimpsest*, and, on the other hand, the intertexts that recur throughout Raymonde's psychic fugues, such as works of art, artists, and scenes and phrases from her past. Additionally, there are the intertexts that readers, with their unique perspectives, find reflected in the text, such as, in my case, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The latter text, also suggestive of the implied author, is particularly evoked in the first half of the story. While repression was hardly a new topic for modernists, "Murex" is particularly interesting for the critic in examining the pleasure-principle in relation to the female artist whose resistance to the recovery of the traumatic past is characterized by a series of metaphors and creative structuring devices.

The opening interrogative of "Murex" has the effect of putting the reader on his or her mettle, establishing an atmosphere of a tense limbo: "Raymonde didn't know what to think. But why think?" (95). Following the repetitions with variations of her mind in the fugue-like prose, readers learn that Raymonde visits London because it snuffs "out vibration of too keen thinking" that provokes her poet's mind (95). Further, the reader may connect what Raymonde calls the "twilight of the spirit" ambiance with the story's subtitle, "War and Postwar London" (95). Readers in 1926 would identify with the twilight zeitgeist and the description of Londoners as "people [who] did so and so" in inevitable routines of numbed habit (95). Further, since H. D. distinguishes Raymonde as belonging to the select category of those with "alert perception" who need soothing, H. D. also positions subsequent readers (who are always already in a "War and Postwar" period) to identify with Raymonde's rhetorical "But why think?" (95).<sup>9</sup> As we come to know Raymonde's character by her own exposure of her mental veils and evasions, the text evokes and resists the reader's desire to judge the character, to either identify with or against her perspective.

Raymonde's "laissez-aller" attitude and seeming indifference are belied by indications that she is looking for a line to cut through her "merging" free-fall from focused thought (97). Such indications include Raymonde's reception of Ermy and her responsiveness to Marion's and

Ermy's appeals to her poet's ego. The distance between the implied author and Raymonde's consciousness (recognized in the reader's ability to see Raymonde's repressions and motives before Raymonde is able) invites the reader into the privileged perspective of the implied author. The implied author thus seems to hail a reader of keen perceptions who can rightly "read" the many layers of Raymonde's consciousness, uncovering (as Raymonde finally must) the "shock" that has derailed her art and which calls for a change in her craft. Before Ermy arrives on the scene as surrogate, then, the reader simultaneously experiences first-hand the perspective of Raymonde and of Raymonde's analyst. In setting up this relationship first, granting a high degree of authority to the reader, H. D. is better able to take up the challenges of her subject, identified by McAlmon as "the cobwebs of after-war London" where women were responsible to "carry on" the literary avant-garde while postwar "men, mainly escaped into despondency of sentimentality, or religious brooding, seeking 'standards,' as their own 'taste' fail[ed] them" (242, 243). Indeed, Raymonde's repression is interwoven with her guilt for carrying on where men have failed—the "tall, young gods" women sent off to war and with whom Raymonde identified in the "annihilat[ing]" pain and near-death experience of childbirth (141).

This psychoanalytic model, evocative of reading and then altering the script of a palimpsest, particularly applies to Raymonde's meditations on women's relation to war throughout history. In the first part of "Murex," Raymonde's consciousness moves from repressing the memory of war to remembering to warn women against complicity in war. In the second part, her composition of the poem attempts to draw a line through history—identifying repetitions of war and women's troubled relation to war since antiquity—to affect the current younger generation of women. In the first part, the repressed memory of the war is the overarching theme or subject that is followed by a "pulse-beat" of a string of associations: the dominant recurring themes and variations that answer this subject are "London," a repetition of "feet," and "forgetting" (98). This braid of associations will have to be unraveled for Raymonde to begin the labor of writing.

Waiting for Ermy to arrive, Raymonde seems to have nothing to do in London but listen and wait, but the narrator—perhaps voicing Raymonde's internal discourse—corrects,

She wasn't listening. She wasn't waiting. She had utterly forgotten. There was a sound of feet. There were feet, feet, feet, feet passing up Sloane Street on the way to Victoria. London had forgotten. She was one with London. She had forgotten. She came to London to forget—feet, feet, feet, feet. There were feet passing up Sloane Street. She had thought she would be so happy [...].  
(96)

However, happiness is not possible in this nullifying atmosphere; rather

than merely repeating the traumatic signifier (“feet, feet, feet, feet”), remembrance of what this phrase signified must occur for Raymonde to resume a creative role. Raymonde came to London to mummify the memories of her experience of the war, particularly the trauma of her stillborn baby and a subsequent affair between her shell-shocked husband Freddie (who fails as poet and husband) and friend Mavis. London and its superficial social surface have granted Raymonde a reprieve which can be extended indefinitely as long as she avoids the thinking and remembering that poetic labor requires, and she has accordingly postponed her trip to the “clear Alpine air” that inevitably “focussed” her mind (98). The first section ends with an ironic underscore of the association of her poetic identity with the buried war; the forgotten shuffling of soldiers’ feet are in counterpoint to poetic meters and the remembering creative writing demands: “Raymonde wasn’t going to face the matter. If Mavis wanted the young man and if Mavis got the young man—All’s fair in love and—feet, feet, feet, feet. They had all forgotten” (99).

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Cathy Caruth’s characterization of narratives of trauma offers a relevant frame for H. D.’s presentation of Raymonde overcoming the death-drive in hearing her own buried story of trauma in Ermy’s recent similar distress. Caruth writes, “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; [...] a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18). The presence of the other—for Raymonde it is Ermy, for the writer it is the ideal reader—enables the articulation and perception of the repressed trauma. Drawing on Freud, Caruth writes that narratives of trauma are often “the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (8).

Like Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, H. D.’s “Murex” tells the story of a trauma awakened to in the encounter with an other; moreover, it carries on a story, a history of trauma, in its uncanny repetitions that must be read and awakened to in the future by subsequent generations of readers. Between its lines the reader is to find “not simply a reality that can be grasped in these words’ representation, but the ethical imperative of an awakening that has yet to occur” (Caruth 112). The vertical, lyric emphasis of H. D.’s *Palimpsest* requires readers to recognize the recurring traumas of a martial-patriarchal history and consider, as Raymonde will, their choices in relation to the unwritten text of the present and future. In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gérard Genette concludes that “the specific merit of hypertextuality is that it constantly launches ancient works into new circuits of meaning. Memory, they say, is ‘revolution-



ary'—provided, no doubt, that it is impregnated, made fruitful, and not reduced to *commemorating*" (400). In Raymonde's character, which is never "reduced to *commemorating*," the instability of remembering and forgetting establishes a tension between the text and the reader on both a personal and political scale. H. D. sifts the layers of history and memory to uncover what is "fruitful" and launches them into new circuits of meaning. As an open or "writerly" text, *Palimpsest* attempts to make the text of the past not only available to be read or experienced for the first time, but also useful to the reader who writes in his or her "now."

H. D.'s readers, particularly in the late 1920s, were likely to share Raymonde's ambivalence about remembering and forgetting. Inheriting the trauma of the war, they would probably resist the difficult process of remembering despite an uneasy familiarity with the connection between forgetting or commemorating and deleterious patterns of repetition. The particular challenge or gift of H. D.'s palimpsest is its combination of lyric immediacy and narrative perspective, leading to a more revolutionary than elegiac vision. The necessary other that H. D.'s triptych posits is the ideal reader who can read back and forth to diagnose Raymonde's malaise—her twilight paralysis—as paradigmatic of the socio-historic moment of postwar London, which itself seems to be paralyzed by an atmosphere of not-remembering. "Murex" offers this ideal reader a case study of traumatic neurosis, the limited horizons of the current avant-garde's response, and how a philosophy of artistic vision modeled on the palimpsest might respond productively to the shocks of modernity.

The section following "They had all forgotten," begins with Raymonde's quoted discourse, her light chatter to Ermy, and an internal narrated monologue of her desire to keep "this odd Jewess, off the main issue, out of it altogether" (99). Despite Raymonde's best efforts, Ermy turns directly to the point by discussing her husband, provoking Raymonde's unspoken exaggerated disdain for getting involved in the tiresome business of husbands. However, as Raymonde's buried refrain of "feet, feet" resurfaces, readers realize that Raymonde's seeming racial othering and disdain for scandal are devices for preserving her own state of repression: "O, do keep quiet. Let it alone. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. London had forgotten. Raymonde wanted to shout at Ermy, 'play the game. Shut up. Don't you see I am, everyone is always fighting, always fighting to—forget? Like London—to forget—feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—feet?'" (100). Raymonde again links war, "feet," forgetting, adding now "husbands," desperate to evade them in their talk (100). Following Freud, the string of associations Raymonde repeats when at the verge of remembering suggests the efforts of the secondary process to substitute the explosive "charge" of "mobile-energy" with a "quiescent (tonic) charge" contained by language (*Beyond* 80). Raymonde's refrain of "feet" is indeed a quiescent charge that needs

only prodding, or the intervention of an other, to reconnect it with its original affective intensities. That reconnection, facing “the past” that was “part of her,” would mean a return of Raymonde’s poet’s identity and the unpleasure of remembering; such stimuli would break her from the cocoon, that “other region” which “[Raymonde] had trained herself (or Ray Bart the poet had so trained her)” to be sustained in, standing “posed, apart” (101, 102).

The first half of “Murex” thus suggests Raymonde’s willing domination by the pleasure-principle.<sup>10</sup> As Raymonde converses with Ermy, the tension between resistance to remembering (thanatos, the death-instinct for quiescence) and the desire to remember and act (the life-instinct Freud associated with *eros* and the poet) plays out over several sections (*Beyond* 64, 79).<sup>11</sup> In H. D.’s representation of the pleasure-principle, the drift and obliteration of the death-instinct precede the rebirth of gratification, thought, and the creativity of the life-instinct and its “complication of the task of living” (*Beyond* 83). As in Freud’s model of the psychic apparatus, she identifies not binaries of irreconcilable opposition but mutually reinforced dialectics, examining their interrelation and borders. While the scene of the two women talking suggests the analyst’s couch, Raymonde is not merely a patient dominated by the death-instinct. Rather, Raymonde embodies the life- and death-instincts and their productive tension; Raymonde is both analysand and analyst who must reconcile her Janus-like role as subject and artist in the world. H. D. does not fashion Ermy as merely an analyst figure either; indeed, Ermy’s subjectivity becomes problematically unknowable in “Murex.” Ermy first serves as Raymonde’s “psychic gramophone or wireless, that had power of recording the exact past,” thus allowing Raymonde to experience that past for the first time, “to be hearing something that she had often heard in her own consciousness but never listened to” (108). As Raymonde listens to the past, which is tied to the poetic labor of remembering, her creative impulse reemerges. Ermy then becomes a screen, a “blank, a tabula rasa,” onto which Raymonde can project and then read her own repressed trauma (126). Ermy, romanticized by Raymonde when she begins composing her poem, becomes both a muse and audience (the addressee of the poem), fueling Raymonde’s efforts to “carry on” in her role as the poet Ray Bart.

These dialectics—of the life and death instincts, of analyst and analysand, of poet and muse—are seen in Raymonde’s resistance to the poet’s work of remembering which H. D. nonetheless represents in Raymonde’s use of a series of creative metaphors: of Ermy and herself engaged in a chess match, a card game, a sword duel, and ultimately as figures in a painting. The last metaphor is most interesting because it situates Raymonde and Ermy in a painting known for its many layers and triptych design, Botticelli’s *Primavera*, which Raymonde saw in Florence on her hon-

eymoon before the war. The intertext of the painting arises at a significant turning point in Raymonde's resistance. Raymonde believes that Ermy, as a "Jew" can "espy in her [...] some deep root of resemblance [...] to Ray Bart," and, characteristically of "Jews," has an "odd way of surprising her off guard" (102).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Ermy's turning to the subject of Raymonde's poetry provokes Raymonde to think, reluctantly, of "Keats, Browning. *Who fished the murex up?*" references which she associates with her own prewar poetry and Florence.

H. D.'s choice of the *Primavera* as an intertext inspires contemplation and commentary for its evocation of an idealized avant-garde in the Renaissance, its use of layers, and its inclusion of a transformation of Greek mythology (Chloris) to Roman (Flora). For Raymonde, it serves not merely to signify a memory of a time lost (her prewar honeymoon, the Renaissance), but also as a way of re-membering that past. H. D. deliberately links the *Primavera*'s palimpsest with "Murex"'s other palimpsests—representing art, pre- and postwar London, and Raymonde's identity: "Behind the Botticelli there was another Botticelli, behind London there was another London, behind Raymonde Ransome there was [...] Ray Bart" (104). In listening to Ermy's story, Raymonde gets beyond the surface texts, recalling details and examining her own story.<sup>13</sup> Finally facing her repressed trauma, it seems that Raymonde uses the painting to compose her past—projecting her memories onto it as a way to order and awaken to that experience. Raymonde reads the painting from right to left, substituting members of her past and present (Freddie, Ermy, Mavis, Marion, and Martin) for the figures on the canvas.<sup>14</sup>

I should note that H. D.'s use of the painting is allusive, and at no point does Raymonde or the narrator state that she is in fact "reading" and "writing" on the ground of the painting in this way. However, the allusions are pervasive, beginning with Raymonde's view of her prewar-self as the nymph Chloris, become Flora in her abduction by Zephyrus (Chloris flees from Zephyrus on the right-hand side of the painting). Raymonde later recalls a dialogue with Freddie, who calls her "Fleurette" during their trip to Florence when she attempted to put off England and marriage for "later" while she admires "these Italian primaveres" (140). Suggesting her subsequent metaphor of a cinematograph, Raymonde's projection of the *Primavera* is not static but layered. When Ermy becomes a "mirror," a "(a highly refined surface) [who] collected, concentrated, gave her back a self that she had so long let drift under drug and anodyne of London," Raymonde then "turned (changing sides, changing now the angle of her observance with almost every heart-beat)" (118). The metaphoric palimpsest of the figures of the Botticelli also changes sides; the reader moves from the triangle of the right hand side (Flora, Chloris, Zephyrus) to Raymonde observing the three women of her past and present (the *Prima-*

*vera's* three Graces). Raymonde imagines a scene which places herself, Mavis, and Ermy alone before a mirror (a revision of a memory of herself and Freddie before a mirror and Ermy's description of a memory of herself and Mavis before a mirror). The women's triangle of gazes in Raymonde's imagined scene evokes the three Graces at the center of the *Primavera*, and Martin's and Freddie's belated (and disruptive) appearances in this scene evoke Botticelli's Mercury and Zephyrus on either side of the painting. However, Botticelli's Mercury, on the left-hand side of the painting, also finally comes to represent Ray Bart—Raymonde's repressed poet self; he wears a sword (which Raymonde has metaphorically wielded against Ermy) and disperses the clouds (the London fog) with a caduceus (H. D.'s treasured symbol of creative healing).

Having recalled both her prewar self and the self traumatized by the war, Raymonde recalls "(that other Raymonde's double) Ray Bart, [who] held a gate-way to a city. [...] Ray Bart would always sleuth and trail and track her [...] Ray Bart who always checkmated her [...] who acclaimed this Jewess. It was the poet, the young spearman who was Raymonde's genius. Ray Bart held a sword of pure steel and it was Ermy who recalled her" (127). In a kind of coda, Raymonde returns to the metaphors of the layered (prewar, wartime, postwar) London, Botticelli's *Primavera*, and her metaphors of a chess game and duel. They are now resolved by the "shock" that Raymonde has been less an actor than a game board or canvas over which Ray Bart has acclaimed Ermy, while Ermy has acclaimed the Ray Bart that Raymonde has kept at bay (127). From Raymonde's perspective, the two have found each other out in spite of her own veils and poses.

While the late thirteenth-century intertext of Botticelli's *Primavera* provides the ground for Raymonde to figure a palimpsest of history, personal identity, and aesthetics, H. D.'s "Murex" particularly privileges the early twentieth-century models of psychoanalysis and cinema. Not only do both combine science and art, but also both appear to be the most recent, and powerful, iterations of Plato's cave. Psychoanalysis and cinema, like H. D.'s self-reflexive lyric narrative, enables the subject to reconsider the external and internalized networks of discourse that shape the self. H. D., like Freud, returns us to the site of Plato's cave in order to allow us to "consider the apparatus" itself (Baudry 760). Raymonde reflects on her poet's consciousness as history's cinematograph, and as the present illuminates the repressed events of her past, she examines them as shadows on the wall of Plato's cave (169). However, overlying the personal trauma are the repetitions of history's traumas: Raymonde's cinematograph metaphor figures history as layers of celluloid, through which the light of antiquity, "flashes of pure fire-blue," illuminates particular moments (164).

The second half of "Murex" follows Raymonde's final descent into the repressed material of her past, as she sits alone in the chair Ermy has

left, and her work to understand the present with this past in mind. Having “opened up this so far so hermetically watertight compartment of her own subconsciousness, she could see further” (139). What Raymonde, and the reader, sees is how she has suppressed her own desires and her poet’s identity: first, in order to bolster Freddie’s identity as a poet and to become a mother to the child Freddie hopes “will perhaps carry on afterwards [...] for me,” and second, in waiting after the war for men such as Ermy’s Martin to take up the poet’s role and the “second flowering of the already over-flowered 1890s” that the war derailed (140, 125). Having been pressed by Ermy to examine the “associations” that have driven her to London, the memories blocked by the shuffling “feet—feet—feet” finally surface (138). The stillborn child and the stillborn generation are exhumed. In removing this mental block, Raymonde is now able to assess her own work as a poet.

Although “Murex” opens with the question, “But why think?”—and indeed, its first nine sections are dominated by the need to understand Raymonde’s choice of the fog and cocoon that London offers, the last sections of the text and its creative climax center on the story’s epigram, quoted from Robert Browning’s “Popularity,” “*Who fished the murex up?*” (95). Browning describes Keats as the admirable fisherman who toils alone to fish “the murex up,” crush its shell and distill its precious purple dye. While the speaker sketches Keats’s poetic process in tribute in Browning’s poem, in H. D.’s “Murex” readers are made to feel the rhythm of the creative process itself. Having spent so many years cocooned by the death-instincts, Raymonde finds the imperative to carry on and the pulse of life painful. Raymonde protests “[t]hat pain and that sound and that rhythm of pain and that rhythm of departure were indissolubly wedded. Or was it her heart beating? Feet, feet, feet, feet. No, Freddie, no Freddie not metres. Not poems. Not that kind of feet” (145). She continues to protest that she is listening, recollecting the past, but not remembering or composing that past, “not beat and throb of metre, no Freddie. I don’t want to write it” (146).

Raymonde’s poetry comes out of “her set determination to see both sides and to see clearly” (148). Out of re-workings of phrases and remembered moments of the past, Raymonde distills the lines of her present poem, which appears in the text as italicized, off-set lines. H. D.’s depiction of the accumulating rhythms that culminate in lines of the poem are punctuated by pauses as the artist returns from a creative consciousness outside of time to a prosaic consciousness of the present; the prose also consistently returns to the need to craft an ethical aesthetics, questioning “laws of hospitality” and how they are tied to “laws of song, laws of being” that are as “undeviating as the laws of sun and moon” (150). Despite Raymonde’s desire for an aesthetic that could discover and communicate “laws

of right and wrong that when applied to the minutiae of worldly life held poignant and unswerving" (151), this methodology is questioned. The final sections of "Murex" reveal a much more ambiguous and perhaps pessimistic strain than critics such as Friedman, Kloefer, and Cassandra Laity have acknowledged. Like Friedman and Kloefer, Laity has read "Murex" as H. D.'s transformation of the romantic landscape to recreate "the regenerate paradise as the locus of a female aesthetics of self-identification—this time in her sister bond," a process of breaking from a "thralldom to patriarchal conceptions of beauty and sexuality" (122). This is an accurate but problematic reading since Raymonde's final "sister bond" with Ermy is one of artist and muse, a relationship that fails to subvert patriarchal conceptions of beauty or the artist-muse hierarchy. Through Raymonde's romanticized projection of Ermy's ethnicity as well as Raymonde's projection of her as a timeless goddess, H. D. establishes a critical distance that implies a critique. Further, it is not clear how H. D. reconstructs a "female aesthetic" since Raymonde's consciousness in "Murex" most frequently insists that male precursors—Browning, Einstein, Joyce (rather than, say, Sappho, Caroline Herschel, or Virginia Woolf)—are "right"; as Ray Bart, it is a bisexual ideal Raymonde pursues. In composing the poem, Raymonde interrogates the limits of her art; moreover, H. D., in her representation of Raymonde's internal discourse, artistically interrogates the political and ethical limits of her contemporaries' and her own work. Critics need to re-examine how H. D. uses intertexts—particularly the recurrent references to Browning, Einstein, and Joyce in Raymonde's internal discourse—to formulate a new law of song, one that can serve her ethical imperative.

Both Browning's "Popularity" and Joyce's *Ulysses* depict the would-be artist's relation to the avant-garde, the avant-garde's role as opening new dimensions, and the advance-guard artist floundering in the search for an audience in the literary marketplace. Just as Browning pays tribute to Keats while identifying himself as Keats's contemporary and successor, not one of the "Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes" of the world, Raymonde pays tribute and affirms her identity as a contemporary of Joyce in her repeated assertions "James Joyce was right" (151). Raymonde shares with Joyce a belief in the alchemical power of art, pursues the epic as a revivifying frame, and believes that art bears the responsibility of remembering: "Joyce was right. It had lost. Art was magic but had lost. [...] Odd line in Egypt spelt exact and scientific formula" and, thinking of poetry's task of remembering, "Mnemosyne," she thinks, "James Joyce was right. Formula to be enduring must be destroyed" (155).

Raymonde also uses the phrase "James Joyce was right" to punctuate her belief that fiction must intimate a new sense of the relationship of time and space. In her vain search for undeviating ethical laws in laws of song, Raymonde is given the gift of relativity—and it is Ermy who has done it:

“Yes, I adore her face for she has given me this. This knowledge that there is no *law*. The knowledge that there are *laws*” (154; emphasis added). This leap to relativity is confirmed as this episode of Raymonde’s composing concludes with her affirmation of a new metaphor for her poet’s perception—“some swift cinematograph” (163). She introduces and repeats the phrase “Einstein was right” to punctuate her formulation of herself as a glass refracting the past and the future: “The present and the actual past and the future were (Einstein was right) one. All planes were going, on, on, on together and the same laws of hospitality held on all levels of life” (166).

While acknowledging the “rightness” of her precursors, an alternate tradition of the advance-guard intellectuals, Raymonde recognizes her need to make of the old texts a new work of art: “James Joyce was right. Formula to be enduring must be destroyed. Mavis was right. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet—the absolute lack of the salt in the formula had sent them to die—where some buried Caesar bled” (155). The formulas of art must be destroyed to create a rebirth of magic in art, so that art can have salt enough to alter the traumatic repetitions of war in history. It is in the new technology of cinema, with its power to manipulate time and space, that Raymonde finds a suggestion of magic. Here, diagnosing art’s shortcomings, Raymonde goes on to imply that an artist who had known how to create with an analyst’s ethic of care and with the impetus of remembering might have been able to intervene and keep soldiers from marching to Victoria Station. Raymonde’s process of refining old laws of art requires the dialectic of forgetting (clearing the surface of the mind for new composition) and remembering (reading the traces of the wax tablet of the subconscious) in order to write the new, a process she applies to both personal and historical trauma.

This remembering prompts Raymonde to insist on a paradox, “There must be one formula for all. One formula written in a cryptic language that everyone would understand” (156). As if offering a metaphoric for the process of composing that is being portrayed, Raymonde sees “[h]er mind behind her mind [as it] turned the handle (so to speak) for a series of impressions that devastated her with their clarity, with their precision and with their variety”—as in a “cinematograph”—faces are overlaid as negatives pasted together, and the prose too enacts this layering by reprising the images and themes of the previous sections (157). Raymonde’s mind thus creates a new kind of palimpsest of history, (consciously or not) selecting scenes and images for a film reel that layers successive modernities: “Antiquity showed through the semi-transparency of shallow modernity like blue flame through the texture of some jelly-fish-like deep-sea creature” (158). With the timeless blue light of “antiquity” illuminating her mind’s projector, Raymonde reads the montage in order to formulate,

or “fish up,” a new enduring art law. Repeating “James Joyce was right,” the theme of the epigraph is “like some deep-sea jewel pulled up in a net squirming with an enormous catch of variegated squirming tentacled and tendrilled memories, just this, this—*who fished the murex up?*” (157). Able to be both twentieth-century equipped (cinematography and psychoanalysis) and tradition based (Browning and Joyce), Raymonde likens herself to the contemporary and precursor (Joyce) who fishes in the layers of personal and public memory (as Browning does in invoking Keats). Within this matrix of influences, we see Raymonde at work as she cracks her murex—Ermy, her projected idealized Other representative of this “modernity”—to extract its prized purple ink for her poem.<sup>15</sup>

Raymonde’s poem heralds the return of Eros, “*Love himself*,” suggesting that she has achieved a balance between the life-instincts and the death-instincts (164) and therefore has achieved her vision, or “outlook.” The “room coming clear” again, Raymonde thinks of “[s]omething to eat,” now satiated with this “answer” found in the metrical law “that ‘hour’ rhymed with ‘flower,’” “a concise and absolute formula for her outlook. East and west. The seen and the only just not-seen. The absolute form enclosing the absolute vacuum behind it. The vacuum held and prisoned in a grain of mustard seed” (165). This pronunciation would be a logical conclusion for H. D.’s “Murex”; Raymonde’s satisfactory completion of the poem that ends with a reconciliation of the speaker with the muse and a suggested departure for “left over apple-tarts in the kitchen” evokes closure and a job well done (152). However, H. D. does not end “Murex” here. As an “instrument,” Raymonde is compelled to continue working on the poem, apparently not satisfied with her “absolute formula,” “the absolute vacuum” being held by the “absolute form” (165). Her readers should not be satisfied either.

Given the tortuous description in “Murex” of Raymonde’s progression from psychic fugue state to a fugue of poetic creation—from a separation of her poetic identity from the contingent present to a reconnection of her poetic identity with prosaic reality—readers likely expect a poem quite different than the pseudo-imagist lyric Raymonde produces. Critics have pointed to the poem as evidence of H. D.’s privileging of imagism as the most refined art, and even readers attentive to H. D.’s pessimism resist noting the poem’s banality.<sup>16</sup> Yet, reading only the italicized lines of the poem yields a series of refined, overwrought images and vague evocations that are rather opaque and more than “a little Omar Khayyámish,” as Raymonde admits (154). Nevertheless, readers of “Murex” are in fact reading back and forth, and the inadequacy of the poem itself underscores the necessity of lyric narrative, the cinematographic mode, a form for H. D. and her readers to express more and “see further.” Behind the poem there is another poem in the prose. Indeed, Raymonde’s monologue offers a meta-



comment on the prose/poetry juxtaposition: “There were songs within songs. The song within the song. The Murex in the deep sea” (163).

In fact, one of the most effective passages of “Murex” is Raymonde’s psychic fugue, which includes songs within this song. Prompted by “songs,” Raymonde listens to a resurfaced memory of Freddie, one in which Freddie recounted to Raymonde his memory of picking up a “Liederbucher” that a German soldier had dropped: “Fritz is the limit, he drops song-books and sings O Tannenbaum.” This memory leads Raymonde back to the broken law: “songs—laws, thou shalt love—” (166). In this moment, the reader simultaneously feels Freddie’s pain for the German soldier and Raymonde’s pain for the shell shocked Freddie who had predicted, bitterly, that the poet Ray Bart would be the one to “come through” and “carry on.” The reader experiences Freddie’s guilt as a poet turned soldier and Raymonde’s guilt (“poor Freddie, going on, on [...] and all the time himself really wanting to write”) in taking his place as a poet after the war (particularly since she finds the poetry at hand so ineffectual), and in failing to write “[t]he song of all, all who had died” (166-67). In framing this layering of experiences in Raymonde’s psychic fugue, H. D. as author, the text’s true cinematographer, is able to do what Raymonde’s poem fails to do. H. D.’s prose portrays abject details of the war and its wake by embedding them in a complex matrix of standpoints that intensifies the affect of Freddie’s latent shell shock. The absence of these abject realities from Raymonde’s poem calls into question the satisfaction Raymonde has temporarily achieved in her “absolute formula” and “absolute form.”

In writing Raymonde with a critical eye that exposes the inadequacy of the imagist poem, H. D. has carried her own method forward. The reader experiences the poignancy of a palimpsest of a history of trauma in reading H. D.’s narrated monologue of Raymonde, not through reading Raymonde’s poem. The satisfaction Raymonde has felt in finding “concise and absolute formula for her outlook” (165) is misplaced because her poem’s rigidity and hermeticism fails to enact an ethical aesthetics. It is Omar Khayyámish, it will not “awaken” Ermy, and it is unlikely to be published and read (161). The poem itself is the satisfying formula that must be destroyed. When “Murex” ends with the final stanzas of her disappointing poem, we have already read about Raymonde’s decision to leave for Cret-d’y-Vau, since “London in perspective” must be seen from a distance, “from the other end of a telescope [...]. Seen like the Athens of Plato was seen, as shadow” (170). This posited departure is the hope that H. D.’s story holds out, but it offers as ambiguous a hope for the birth of a new ethical aesthetics as Stephen Dedalus’s departure from Leopold Bloom’s home in the “Ithaca” episode of *Ulysses*.

H. D.’s repetition of socio-political narratives from antiquity to the present suggests an unending compulsion to repeat martial history until

the unconscious/invisible apparatuses of a patriarchal social structure are confronted. Raymonde's poetics and her departure for Cret-d'y-Vau, as H. D. frames them in the palimpsest, are ambiguous and refuse satisfactory closure. The reader's final question, then, is not whether Raymonde's creative identity has reemerged, since clearly it has; rather, it is whether that identity has emerged transformed from its cocoon. If Raymonde declares a will to resume her service as Ray Bart, it is perhaps with a difference. On the verge of completing her poem, Raymonde repeats one of her themes with a significant difference: "Banalties were the real facts. Fortunes in tea-leaves. James Joyce (she had found that the advance-guard of the intellectuals was usually on the right track) was in her inmost searching mind, repudiated" (171-72). Given that the themes and aesthetics of Joyce's *Ulysses* are echoed throughout "Murex" (Raymonde and Ermy in London offer a transvaluation of Stephen and Bloom in Dublin), this variation on her recurring theme "James Joyce was right" raises questions regarding Raymonde's belief in the efficacy of "the advance-guard of the intellectuals" (172). H. D., whose prose writing is certainly on the margins, uses the palimpsest form to interrogate the artistic communities to which she has contributed as well as to invite readers to examine the "politics of identity" that inform art's perceptual matrix (Vanderborg 100). Choosing this palimpsest form, H. D. reveals the paradox of her characters' and her own "marginal" writing: that, in theory, in order to effect change, difficult form is necessary; yet, in practice, the difficulty of the writing makes it less likely to effect political, ethical transformation.

By the late 1920s, the support networks for such marginal writing faced an internal as well as external critique. In the May 1929 issue of *The Little Review*, a magazine of key importance to many "advance-guard" artists of modernism, editors Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap announced its discontinuation. The issue compiles responses to their questionnaire from artists who have contributed to the magazine (including H. D. and Joyce). Jane Heap, in "Lost: A Renaissance," prefaces the issue with an overview of the magazine and their decision:

The revolution in the arts, begun before the war, heralded a renaissance. *The Little Review* became an organ of this renaissance. [...] No doubt all so-called thinking people hoped for a new order after the war. This hope was linked with the fallacy that men learn from experience. Facts prove that we learn no more from our experiences than we do from our dreams. (5)

In a stunning indictment of high modernism (and perhaps also psychoanalysis), Heap has come to the conclusion: "Self-expression is not enough; experiment is not enough; the recording of special moments or cases is not enough," and art has ceased "to be concerned with the legitimate and permanent material of art" (6).

Nonetheless, in the years leading up to this renunciation, writers such as H. D. doggedly pursued the formidable “job for art” to bring about a critical organ of awakening by connecting the “recording of special moments” of the everyday to an expansive vision that included both the topographies of history and the unconscious (Heap 6). As modernism became established, broaching the canonical, authors of lyric narrative wrote self-reflexively, asking readers to participate in and interrogate the work of art (accenting both the reciprocal labor and the product of “the work of art”). Such “difficult” art as a mode of philosophy, or philosophy in an aesthetic mode,<sup>17</sup> relied upon the reader’s vision and refused clarification and closure. Despite the arguments of critics who advocated a return to social realism during the 1930s, the decision of writers such as H. D. to continue to work with lyric narrative and palimpsest is not naïve. Although H. D.’s text is difficult, as McAlmon forewarned, in her refusal to dictate the text’s meaning or foreclose the circulation of its intertexts’ meanings, H. D. privileges the reader’s subjective vision as the “magic” that can add salt to the formula and alter the page of the new.

H. D. turned to the cinematographic mode, the combination of lyric and narrative in the new model of the old palimpsest, as a productive direction for avant-garde artists. However, H. D.’s “Murex” emphasizes that her turn to the cinematic and palimpsest text differed significantly from one of Raymonde’s avant-garde contemporaries. If James Joyce provided the model of such a method in *Ulysses*, then the art laws that Raymonde “repudiate[s]” near the conclusion of “Murex” are the art laws of the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. It is the latter text’s perceived solipsism, its refusal of a mitigating thread of narrative that would open the text to a larger audience, from which Raymonde breaks in order to pursue her own formula. Indeed, this difference is made clear in the last issue of *The Little Review*. Whereas H. D. earnestly replies to each of the *The Little Review*’s questions (discussing her work on a “lyrical” POOL group film), Joyce, in contrast, sends “PROOF 5 of installment in Transition Quarterly No. 1.,” a palimpsest-scored copy of a page of *Work in Progress* (i.e. *Finnegans Wake*) in lieu of an answer. In H. D.’s novel three years earlier, Joyce had served Raymonde as a precursor and guide (in the same way that Browning makes Keats serve as his murex); nonetheless, in reading the palimpsest of her experience and the topography of the intertexts that make up her psychic fugue, Raymonde and H. D. must decide to go in a different direction than her contemporary.

Immediately following Raymonde’s repudiation, her thought continues: “Fortunes in tea-leaves. The world in a grain of mustard seed. Imprisoned in a nut-shell and king of infinite space. Bad dreams, bad dreams” (172). Like the Hamlet Raymonde quotes, and like Stephen after his elaborated and denied theory of Shakespeare in “Scylla and Charybdis,” Ray-

monde is at a crossroads. Either she will reign over and elaborate upon her universe in a nut-shell or she will move out of the cocoon of protection that her London flat provides. In his book of the dark, Joyce far out distanced writers of the avant-garde, so much so that his elaborate play with signifiers is a game with few and belated takers.<sup>18</sup> In elaborating this nutshell universe, Joyce was viewed by many of his contemporaries as both prisoner and king of an empty space—a void with no answering light. Facing this black hole, Raymonde has learned that she must gather light and heat from her world and give back light and heat in her writing, as H. D.'s repeated image of artist and muse as binary stars suggests.<sup>19</sup> In order for her aesthetic laws to serve ethical laws, Raymonde must reassess her role as an intellectual of the advance-guard.

Finishing her poem, Raymonde's thoughts layer images of trauma—her own and Ermy's. She recalls Freddie's words, but repudiates them as well:

Si j'ai parlé de mon amour. It was too late. It was all shattered.  
She must find other things, not stare and stare any longer into  
the crystal ball of her past, all the memories shut up in one small  
spherical surface, her own head, to be watched going round and  
round and round. Cret-d'y-Vau. She would go there. (172)

With this resolve, "Raymonde had the last stanzas," the imagist stanzas that ironically complete the story (172). H. D. ultimately gives us a portrait of Raymonde as a maturing artist who must negotiate her own Scylla and Charybdis—on the one hand, rejecting the solipsism of her imagist lyrics, and, on the other, avoiding numbness and nearsightedness when immersed in the anonymity of London's marketplace. The competing prose-poetry sections at the end of "Murex" emphasize the tension of lyric and narrative and affirm the necessity of moving between the two modes if art is to meet modernity.

In "Murex," a text that explores the discursive nature of subjectivity, Raymonde's experience of trauma and repression offers the reader a site for examining both the personal and social forces implicated in that experience. Further, however, the distance of the implied author and Raymonde's own self-critique in "Murex" call into question the poet's or writer's complicity in perpetuating the status quo that has led to her crisis. H. D.'s portrayal of the mythopoeic capacity of her protagonist is ambivalent—Raymonde's pseudo-writing cure enables an ontological exploration, but seems also to offer only a tenuous practical response to that exploration. In other words, in H. D.'s prose work, the belief in writing as redemption—personal and socio-political—is ambiguous. While the narrator privileges Raymonde with the ability to compose a poem that draws out the tragic repetitions of history and to identify with the scribes that have written against the devastation of war, the fact of the repetition of the

poet as a Cassandra undercuts Raymonde's redemptive role. The uneasy ambiguity H. D. inserts, then, is whether the poet's myth-making capacity subserves the death-instincts of culture, rather than the life-instincts that Freud identifies with the poet. The lyric narrative of *Palimpsest* and its self-reflexive scene of the poet at the work of art allows H. D. both to achieve and break open "The absolute form enclosing the absolute vacuum behind it. The vacuum held and prisoned in a grain of mustard seed" (165). Leaving open that gap, H. D. calls her readers to interrogate their fictions, seeking in both the ordinary fictions of society that preserve the status quo and the extraordinary fiction of the avant-garde text, the germs of revolution.

### Notes

1. Like H. D.'s character Raymonde, I use "avant-garde" to refer to intellectual and aesthetic artists and works that were in advance of their time (171-72). While prompted by Raymonde's particular standpoint in defining the term (Botticelli, Browning, and Joyce are her touchstones), I do find it useful to conceive of the avant-garde as a mode recurring across historical periods, and modernism as one period particularly rich in avant-garde movements. As a modernist artist Raymonde faces two challenges in the post-WWI period: the postwar politicizing of the avant-gardes that had emerged before the war "(dada, surrealism, Russian constructivism)" and the devaluation of traditional forms of art "by new forms of culture with direct social utility (modern typography and design, photojournalism, cinema, jazz and revue culture, etc.)" (Miller 29). Although identifying with the avant-garde, Raymonde also begins to realize that by romanticizing a particular "advance-guard" intellectual (171) her work has become paradoxically mired in a rear guard, a realization exacerbated by postwar avant-garde movements (particularly surrealism) that saw a revolutionary potential in the relation of art and politics/history. Traumatized by the war, artists such as Raymonde sought an ethical aesthetics that could reorganize "the praxis of life through art" (Bürger 46), an avant-garde modernism, yet also retained a belief in the importance of the "advance-guard intellectuals" of an aesthetic modernism cultivated before the First World War (171-72).
2. H. D. recounts a pivotal career moment with Ezra Pound in the British Museum in which he "scrawled 'H. D. Imagiste' at the bottom of the page" of the poem "Hermes of the Ways" thus launching her career (*End to Torment* 18). See also Friedman's *Penelope's Web* (36-38).
3. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that *Palimpsest* "does not signal that it should be read as autobiography," but still approaches the text as "a palimpsest of its author's psyche" (*Penelope's Web* 238). Deborah Kel-

ly Kloepfer's "Fishing the Murex Up: Sense and Resonance in H. D.'s *Palimpsest*" analyzes the text's linguistic palimpsest and the recurring themes between the three stories, cracking this "vastly underestimated modernist murex" (201). My study builds upon Kloepfer's foundational work, departing from her autobiographical frame and focusing on "Murex" (196). My analysis follows Morris's *How to Live / What to Do: H. D.'s Cultural Poetics* which shifts the critical discussion to H. D.'s texts and "a wider discussion of the relationship between poetic forms and cultural meanings" (13).

4. Writing to Havelock Ellis, in anticipation of analysis with Freud, H. D. considers becoming licensed for psychoanalysis, imagining herself becoming a "poet-psycho-analyst"; in the same paragraph, she refers to the period of writing *Palimpsest* and echoes its refrain of the need to "carry on" (*Analyzing Freud* 11).
5. In contrast to much of H. D.'s prose work, which she left unpublished or printed through small presses in editions of 100 copies, McAlmon's Contact Press in Paris published *Palimpsest* in 1926, with 700 copies appearing the same year in America under the Houghton Mifflin imprint (Moore ix). Friedman's *Penelope's Web* offers an overview of H. D.'s publication history and a discussion of the dual importance of poetry and prose for H. D. after 1916 (4). Robert Spoo discusses H. D.'s relation to the literary marketplace in his introduction of one of the "Dijon series" texts, *Kora and Ka*.
6. McAlmon addresses this impasse in his introduction, writing that by the 1920s, H. D. was "person enough for the now, for her, safe 'harp with one string' frozen lyric; and for prose also" (241). H. D.'s letters mark moments of retrenchment in her identity as, foremost, a poet, influenced by demands of the public in the late 1930s and early 1950s (*Analyzing Freud* 530, 539). Norman Holmes Pearson, voicing her "clamouring" fans in America, encouraged her return to poetry after the Second World War.
7. This sense of lyric as a poetic mode, rather than a "song" or "poem," follows James Phelan's definition. Phelan modifies Susan Stanford Friedman's definition of lyric as "a mode that foregrounds a *simultaneity*, a cluster of feelings or ideas that projects a gestalt in stasis," by adding that lyric suspends "internal judgments of characters (and narrators)" (31, 33).
8. The term "psychic fugue" plays double duty here. First, "fugue" refers to H. D.'s use of what I call fugue writing, an avant-garde prose writing that H. D., Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein utilized, and which Wyndham Lewis vilified in *Time and Western Man* (1928). Second, "fugue" refers to the psychoanalytic use of the term. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

*fugue*, n. 1. 'A polyphonic composition constructed on one or more short subjects or themes, which are harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint, and introduced from time to time with various contrapuntal devices' (Stainer and Barrett). [...] 2. *Psychiatry*. A flight from one's own identity, often involving travel to some unconsciously desired locality. It is a dissociative reaction to shock or emotional stress in a neurotic, during which all awareness of personal identity is lost though the person's outward behaviour may appear rational. On recovery, memory of events during the state is totally repressed but may become conscious under hypnosis or psycho-analysis.

9. Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* holds up H. D. with Ezra Pound as "exemplary fables of modernism's fate," arguing that her "cocoon" world led to "a withdrawal from genuine social exchange, a retreat into the complacency of the coterie and solipsistic reverie" (155, 170). However, in "Murex," H. D.'s foremost concern is to depict the dangers of a social and/or aesthetic cocoon.
10. According to Freud, "The pleasure-principle seems directly to subvert the death-instincts; it keeps guard, of course, also over the external stimuli, which are regarded as dangers by both [death and life] instincts, but in particular over the inner increases in stimulation which have for their aim the complication of the task of living" (*Beyond* 83).
11. Following Freud's theory, the death-instinct of the pleasure-principle seeks to evade unpleasure by blocking and binding stimuli—whether the potential threat of memory or of desire. In support of "the existence of death-instincts," Freud cites "[o]ur recognition that the ruling tendency of psychic life [...] is the struggle for reduction, keeping at a constant level, or removal of the inner stimulus tension (the Nirvana-principle, as Barbara Low terms it)" (*Beyond* 71). Raymonde's London is associated with "the odd over-consciousness that comes with annihilated pain" (110). In contrast, the younger generation and Ermy are yet "in a world of conscious pain," not the "nebulous Nirvana" of London to which she has "escaped" (111).
12. Raymonde notes Ermy's Jewishness whenever she resumes a position of resistance against the traumatic memories Ermy invokes. Significantly, Freud's article "Resistances to Psycho-Analysis" (1925) identifies "the personality of the present writer as a Jew" as a source of society's resistance to psychoanalysis and also suggests that the identity of the exile may have been important in developing the discipline: "Nor is it perhaps entirely a matter of chance that the first advocate of psycho-analysis was a Jew. To profess belief in this new theory called

- for a degree of readiness to accept a situation of solitary opposition—a situation with which no one is more familiar than a Jew” (XIX: 222). In critiquing the romanticizing of the other by the poet, H. D.’s dialectics imply finally that each culture contains at least two subsets that are mutually reinforcing and intertwined. As Joyce writes in *Ulysses*, “Jewgreek is greekjew” (15: 2097–8).
13. Freud read *Palimpsest* in preparation for H. D.’s analysis, and in H. D.’s portrayal of their analysis in *Tribute to Freud*, she uses many of the same metaphors she used in “Murex.”
  14. The *Primavera* is usually read as an allegory of spring. To the right of Venus at center, a death-like Zephyrus grasps the fleeing Chloris, who is transformed into Flora (Chloris seems to reach out to the indifferent Flora). To the left of Venus, the three Graces move in a circular dance, while to their right Mercury faces off-left, dispersing the clouds from Venus’s garden with an upraised caduceus. Venus, who looks directly at the viewer, seems to stand apart from the unfolding story. Given Raymonde’s vision of herself as a “Savonarola” wanting to protect Ermy (132), the socio-historic context of the painting is particularly relevant: see Charles Dempsey’s *The Portrayal of Love*.
  15. Ermy is “a misfit,” “a Jew,” “a formula,” who “spelt something,” and it is up to Raymonde to translate her, to open and awaken her: “Unopened, unawakened. [...] Ermy wasn’t born. She was dead. The East. The Lotos of Buddha” (161). Here, Raymonde finds the salt that might add savour to the West’s impotent laws of song.
  16. Claire Buck, who offers an excellent reading of the paradox of Raymonde’s efforts and the position of the reader in relation to *Palimpsest*, elides the poem’s quality in asserting, “The poem Raymonde writes, however, is made virtually impossible to read because it is never printed as a whole” (63).
  17. Relatedly, H. D.’s partner Bryher reported that Freud saw psychoanalysis “as a philosophical system applicable to some earnest thinkers who might influence the great wave of life” (*Analyzing Freud* 348–49). H. D. also felt that his turn to “artists” as the Second World War approached indicated the importance of the role of the artist in continuing his vision.
  18. Analyzing *Finnegans Wake*’s “infra-structure,” David Hayman implicitly argues that agreeing to play Joyce’s game means playing a narrowly defined role in a game “organized down to its least unit” (129).
  19. This image is prominent in *HERmione* and *The Gift*.

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