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Mourning Eros: Hieroglyphic love and loss in H.D.'s Helen in Egypt

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Mourning Eros

Hieroglyphic Love and Loss in

H.D.'s Helen in Egypt

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Bachelor of Arts – Honours (English)

Faculty of Education and Arts

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USE OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

H.D. and Lacan both articulate a philosophy of love that exists beyond the sexual relationship. This thesis highlights the concordance between their later writings on love, with a specific focus on Lacan's *Book XX, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972 – 1973 (Encore)*, and H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*. Initially, I address the paradox of erotic love to explicate the way fantasy results in the death of the woman within the sexual relationship. I then argue that a subject must experience a phase of mourning the fantasy of erotic love in order to progress to a new way of understanding love that is 'beyond sex'. I approach mourning from a Freudian perspective to emphasise the importance of letting go of past attachments in order to relinquish and transcend ideals of romantic love. This, I argue, is necessary for a subject's ability to be liberated from illusions of love, develop intersubjective relationships, and subsequently, to achieve real love. Finally, this thesis situates H.D.'s construction of men as the crucial element to identifying love between the sexes. Both H.D. and Lacan suggest a type of masculinity that is not dependant on fantasy and this, I argue, is the key to intersubjective, loving relationships. Where relationships based on idealised erotic love result in the death of the other, real love's only imperative is life.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Shauna Dorotich

30 October 2009

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Contents

Introduction	- 2 -
1 The Veil of Cytheraea	- 9 -
Lacan: The Sexual Relationship	- 10 -
H.D.'s Helen	- 13 -
2 Mourning Eros	- 20 -
Eros Lost	- 23 -
Into the Chrysalis: Leukè	- 27 -
The Phoenix-nest	- 32 -
3 Love	- 35 -
Lacanian Love – “beyondsex”	- 36 -
The New Mortal	- 37 -
“Eidolon”: Thetis – the Supreme Being	- 39 -
Recognition: The Subject-to-Subject Relation	- 42 -
Conclusion	- 47 -
References	- 52 -

Introduction

Eros

*Bittersweet, irrepressible love
loosens my limbs and I tremble*

Sappho

Sappho was the first to call Eros ‘bittersweet’ (Carson, 1998, p. 3). Before Carson’s acknowledgment of Sappho, H.D. epithetised her ‘The Wise Sappho’ and went on to base her ultimate epic works, indeed to build an entire philosophy, on the very same paradox of love that enthralled Sappho more than two millennia ago. The ‘bittersweet’ paradox of Eros is that when a woman in love enters a sexual relationship it is almost impossible for her to retain a psyche that is distinct from her lover, which inevitably results in her psychical death. The paradox of Eros also dominated the works of both Freud and Lacan; Freud fervently believed in the duality of Eros and Thanatos as the two primal instincts (2008, p. XVII), while Lacan took Freud’s theory further to marry Eros and Thanatos: “Eros is defined as the fusion that makes one from two” (1998, p. 66). For Lacan, this idea of making one from two is not love, but death – “the reduction to dust” (Lacan, p. 66) of the one who is leftover, of the lover whose psyche is expelled by the fusion of two lovers becoming one entity – and as such, Eros negates the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between lovers. For all of these philosophers, and countless more, Eros has presented a paradox of how to reconcile the disparate forces of love and death: a quandary that is arguably of the greatest significance to the human experience and that returns relentlessly to the hearts of philosophers and poets alike. It is hard to imagine a more appropriate historical figure than ‘Helen’ upon which to focus an explication of the paradox of Eros; as ‘the face that launched a thousand ships’ where the love she inspired resulted in her symbolic death, she is the quintessential exemplar of the bittersweet impasse of erotic love.

Traditionally, Helen has been positioned purely in relation to sexuality: either her own, or in her answer to the call of another’s. *Helen in Egypt* acknowledges the artifice of such characterisation by aligning the mythical Helen of Troy with a ‘phantom’, a phantom that now haunts the Helen who hibernates in Egypt. The opening poem explains: “*Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom, substituted for the real Helen, by jealous deities*” (H.D., 1974, p. 1).

In Egypt, Helen remains isolated, frozen in time, and content with her dreamscape fantasies. Within her fantasies, Helen continues her pattern of seeking Eros, but now, when it erupts in the form of Achilles, she asks, “I was happier alone / why did I call him to me? / must I forever look back?” (p. 36). This reflective element of H.D.’s Helen is important; it differentiates her from previously vapid and sexualised portrayals, and ignites her search to re-evaluate the impact of erotic love on her subjectivity.

Gradually, within H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*, Helen aligns Eros with Eris, love with strife, highlighting her progress towards understanding the inherent discord of forever living in hope of achieving lasting erotic love. As she revisits and analyses her past, Helen realises that to continue to privilege ‘idealised love’ would inevitably result in the death of her psyche (the ‘reduction to dust’ for the woman in love). From this point onwards Helen’s quest alters, she is conscious of the fact that she is undoing the ‘phantom’ of herself – detaching her psyche from the ‘Helen’ that is depicted in Greek mythology – and its ideals, and this forms the ‘loss’ that she must finally detach herself from through the process of mourning. As she reinterprets her attachment to idealised erotic love, other forms of love start to suggest themselves in opposition to the initial obsession. Theseus, once the instigator of lust for the younger phantom Helen, is brought forth from mythology, an older, gentler father figure who offers a nurturing love. Furthermore, recollections of sisterly and maternal love are present in her visits to Clytemnestra and Hermione. These alternative possibilities of love function to gently detach Helen from the ideal she is mourning and assist her return to reality; Helen is awakened to the possibility of ‘love’ that is, for Lacan, distinct from the sexual relationship.

Helen in Egypt consists of three sections: “Pallinode”, “Leukè”, and “Eidolon”. Both “Pallinode” and “Leukè” contain seven books, each made up of eight individual poems. Similarly, the final section, “Eidolon”, includes six books of eight poems. Within this structure, each poem is prefaced with a short prose reflection that recalls the tradition of the choral voice present in Stesichorus’ and Euripides’ works, on which H.D. based this re-vision (H.D., 1974, vii). A further reminiscence of the tradition is the narrative unity that prevails despite the potentially disorienting scene changes and diversity of speakers; H.D.’s strict adherence to her characteristic¹ use of three-line stanzas supports the flow

¹ H.D. rendered many of her later poetic works in couplets and tercets, including *Hermetic Definition* (1972), *Trilogy* (1998), *Sagesse* (1972), *Helen in Egypt* (1974), and *Winter Love* (1972).

and unity of the lyric narrative as a whole. Also true to H.D.'s art is the pervasive tangle of allusions and wordplay that weave the narrative across a dreamscape canvas, layering and reinforcing her philosophical arc². The allusions present in *Helen in Egypt* are extensive and I do not attempt to decipher them all within this thesis; such an undertaking would vastly exceed the scope of this project. I will, however, address this crucial aspect of H.D.'s poetics within the confines of illuminating their relevance to H.D.'s exploration of love.

Parallel Philosophies

At present there exists a significant absence of critical awareness of the correlation between the late writings by Lacan and H.D. and it is this parallel that I address, in addition to Freud's concept of mourning, in this thesis. It is important to note that this parallel manifests by noticing the ways Lacan and H.D. evoke a form of philosophical conversation; despite their difference in choice of philosophical platform, they still explore the same concepts, and arrive at the same conclusions. As such, I will show the way that Lacan's theoretical progress paralleled H.D.'s poetic journey as it moved through stages of understanding and articulating sexual difference, subjectivity, signification, and finally the possibility of love beyond sexuality.

Critical approaches to H.D.'s work have primarily explored the presence of themes such as the image, war, and most extensively, sexuality and gender. Early responses to H.D.'s poetry centred on her early involvement with the 'Imagist' movement³: in 1975, Susan Friedman published the article "Who Buried H.D.? A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in 'The Literary Tradition'", her response to the tentative re-emergence of critical interest subsequent to L.S. Dembo's dedication to H.D. in the 1969 special issue of *Contemporary Literature*. In this article, Friedman argued that H.D. was "Caged in a literary movement that lasted all of six or seven years... the more difficult epic poetry she went on to write is seldom studied or taught" (1975, p. 801). In 1981, after Friedman

² In her introduction to *Trilogy*, Alik Barnstone contends, "By sending her readers to other works, H.D. sends them on an intertextual journey that helps them recreate the text, and, in some measure, her own creative process" (1998, pp. xvii-xviii). Barnstone does concede, however, that the task of deciphering H.D.'s complex use of allusions is limitless and subsequently settles on her goal "to illuminate the most important allusions" (p. xvii).

³ Barnstone contends that this perception of H.D. continued to prevail; in 1998 she stated, "Despite her enormous output and radical poetics, H.D.'s reputation lingers unfairly back in the early decades of the century, under the restrictive label of 'Imagist', one which she adamantly rejected" (H.D., 1998, p. vii).

published *Psyche Reborn*, an exploration of H.D.'s interactions with psychoanalysis and esoteric religion, feminist critical interest in H.D.'s later 'epic' poetry flourished; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Susan Friedman and Elizabeth Hirsh specifically focused on feminine mythmaking and sexuality in *Helen in Egypt*, while Susan Gubar and Alice Ostricker explored these themes in *Trilogy*. More recently, Mary Galvin, in 1999, and Kathryn Simpson, in 2004, explored the presence of lesbian and queer themes in H.D. with a shift towards considerations of the instability of gender, identity, and poetics of the female body.

H.D.'s later works have largely been through a pragmatic feminist framework, and for anti-war agendas. While these readings have been important, they sometimes overlook H.D.'s other interests: H.D. wrote her perpetual search in an attempt to understand the realm of the psyche in *relation* to the conflicted world she inhabited. Therefore, my aim is to return to reading H.D. with a focus on her deeper concerns with love and subjectivity. As opposed to those earlier interpretations, which align her works with social and political concerns, it is my position that H.D.'s interest in the turbulent post-war and feminist environments was also one of seeking new ways of understanding subjectivity. If she challenged gender roles, she did so in an attempt to understand what was arbitrary in her psyche, to locate the constructed elements of her identity that were incongruent with her intuition. In this sense, H.D. does demonstrate a unique type of feminism; whilst pragmatic feminisms tend to adopt a specifically female centred approach to uncover and intervene in oppressive social practices⁴, H.D.'s feminism differs by paying equal attention to masculinity and more closely resembles the poststructuralist feminist concern with the 'phallogocentric'⁵ function of language. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous asks for a re-imagining of traditional inscriptions of sexual difference and believes there are "few exceptions" that address this in "Ancient History" (2004, pp. 350-351). Much of Cixous' writing on the sexual relation closely echoes H.D.'s in *Helen in Egypt* and as such I will draw on their many philosophical agreements throughout this thesis. *Helen in Egypt* demonstrates H.D.'s exploration of a complex spectrum of masculinities and ultimately writes strikingly sensual alternatives to the singular vision of men the majority of feminists strictly oppose; she gives rare voice to the range of masculinities that patriarchal social structures continue to oppress. H.D.'s battle was personal; while the

⁴ Klages' 1997 lecture *Helene Cixous: "The Laugh of the Medusa"* offers a concise comparative discussion explicating the objectives, and differences between, 'pragmatic' and 'poststructuralist' feminisms.

⁵ Klages explains the origins of the term 'phallogocentric' as the idea "that the structure of language is centered by the phallus" in Western cultural systems (para. 9).

political and social world is certainly present in the allusions within her poetry, I believe that she primarily analysed social issues in order to tease out and comprehend the relevance they held for her in her absolute dedication to decipher a way to love, and be loved, beyond artifice.

Despite ongoing study and application of Lacan's theories, especially in the fields of Cultural and Literary Theory, there has been relatively little attention granted to his writings on 'love', the focus of *Seminar XX*. Lacan himself declares, "I've been doing nothing but that since I was twenty, exploring the philosophers on the subject of love" (1998, p. 75). As with H.D., Lacan's subsequent attempt to articulate a theory of love beyond sexuality came late in his career, and later still to readers of his work translated into English. I am accessing Lacan's *Ecrits and Book XX, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972 – 1973 (Encore)* as translations, and have selected those written by Bruce Fink under the supervision of Jacques-Alain Miller. These translations are especially useful in accessing and understanding Lacan's ambiguities in his use of French; Fink offers copious notes, explanations, and cross-references to assist the reader. Fink's works are regarded as superior to Alan Sheridan's due to the transparency of the translations in approaching the ambiguities, and deciphering the wordplay, in Lacan's use of the French language.

Freud's presence, both within and beyond feminist and queer studies of H.D., has predominantly worked towards positioning *him*, as opposed to his *theories*, as the principle influence in her works, attributing him the role of father figure/dream guide/patriarchal oppressor in her epics. This approach to the connection between H.D. and Freud emphasises her position as his analysand and negates the presence of a multifaceted relation; a tender friendship that grew out of mutual philosophical interests and shared intellectual passion. Indeed, a vast majority of writings on H.D. seem always, at some stage, to resort to references to *Tribute to Freud* (H.D., 1984) – a reflective and candid memoir H.D. wrote in farewell to her friend, which has been taken as the ultimate 'key' to interpreting her other works (Friedman, 1975, p. 804). Brian Brodhead Glaser's "H.D.'s Helen in Egypt: Aging and the Unconscious" is no different; however what is new in this 2005 article is the proposition that *Helen in Egypt* be read in terms of H.D.'s stage of life at the time of writing it (pp. 100-106). Glaser's approach is significant; it attributes to H.D. the maturity that her other critics too often neglect, an oversight that

contradicts her intense focus on the impact of psychical rebirth on subjectivity and love, the theme that dominates her later works.

Concordant with H.D.'s focus on rebirth, *Helen in Egypt* explores the importance of letting go of past attachments by working through a process that echoes the Freudian model of mourning. Freud's work on the process of mourning continues to be of interest within both psychoanalytic and literary theory with a move towards understanding the potential of transcendence and rebirth as the outcome of letting go of psychic attachments. During the late 1980s and 1990s Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler all found Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917/2008) indispensable in exploring new understandings of subjectivity and the ego, and in 2008, Nalini Bhushan drew comparisons between Buddhist and Freudian treatments of loss as central to the cycle of detachment and rebirth. I will draw on both Butler's and Bhushan's developments of Freud's model for mourning to explore H.D.'s approach to Helen letting go of her attachment to idealised love.

Framing Love

My exploration of *Helen in Egypt* focuses on the way Helen's journey parallels the stages of mourning as outlined in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. Within the framework of mourning, I apply a Lacanian approach to trace her transition from identifying love with the sexual relationship, to letting go of delusions in order to develop an awareness of love that transcends the fantasy that is implicit to desire. Occasionally, I have chosen to quote at length from carefully selected poems in *Helen in Egypt*. I do this because I believe, in those instances, it is the only way to convey the way H.D. builds crucial images that span the length of the poem. Where this occurs, I immediately follow such passages with a thorough explanation of their relevance to my argument.

Chapter 1 compares H.D.'s Helen to her portrayal in Euripides' *The Trojan Women* and *Helen*⁶, to highlight the way Helen has traditionally functioned as a hieroglyph, or sign, of

⁶ It is important to note here that in accessing the plays of Euripides I have elected to work with the English translations of Arthur S. Way. These translations (first published 1894-1898) appear alongside the original Greek text and carry a particular focus on maintaining fidelity to the original works. This fidelity, whilst at times challenging in deciphering the language, provides a more transparent window into Euripides' works

masculine desire. The theoretical model I use to approach the function of fantasy in the sexual relation is Lacan's work on sexual difference. Chapter 2 will then focus on Helen's process of mourning to show the way she works towards understanding her subjectivity. I work with Freud's mourning theory to explicate how Helen undoes her attachment to erotic love, and her own sexualised identity, through repetitively revisiting and interrogating her phantom's sexual relationships. Within this framework, I conduct a close reading of selections of the epic poem that demonstrate the development of Helen's stages of mourning that lead to her final rebirth and return to reality.

Chapter 3 returns to Lacan with a new perspective of Helen's subjectivity to discuss the way the text demonstrates Helen's changing perspective, and traces her discovery of a different love that breaches the limitations of desire. As such, I consider H.D.'s depiction of love in relation to Lacan's ideas presented in *Seminar XX* to show the way they correlate in their articulation of discordance between the sexual relation and love. I explore the parallel that exists between Lacan's theory on love and H.D.'s poetic contemplation of it, to highlight the philosophical approach that H.D. employed in her speculative exploration of Helen's psyche. Ultimately, however, I focus on *Helen in Egypt* with the objective of executing a reading that maintains the integrity of the text's revelation of H.D.'s philosophy on love.

than recent translations. Furthermore, due to the myriad translations of Euripides' plays, the titles of the works also present divergences. To achieve consistency with H.D.'s terminology, I will adopt the titles that she indicates in *Helen in Egypt*, with the exception of Euripides' play of the same name; to avoid confusion I will use Way's title, *Helen*.

The Veil of Cytheraea

"Helen was put on earth to catalyse desire... She is a factotum for our fantasies"

(Hughes, 2006, p. 309)

In Greek mythology, Aphrodite, 'Goddess of Desire', and mother of Eros, "rose naked from the foam of the sea and, riding on a scallop shell, stepped ashore first on the island of Cythera" (Graves, 1992, p. 49). Aphrodite's principal site of affiliation eventually became Cyprus and, in *Helen in Egypt*, Aphrodite-Cypris-Cytheraea are interchangeable signifiers for the same goddess, signifiers that H.D. wields as synonyms for desire. The 'veil of Cytheraea' thus translates as the facade of desire, fantasy. Aphrodite's son, Eros, is the incarnate symbol of sexual passion; when they operate together, they fuse and spawn the meaning of sexual passion being a product of fantasy (Graves, p. 58). In this chapter, I will demonstrate the way that, for both H.D. and Lacan, desire masks the fallacy of two becoming one, the illusion of woman's inclusion within a relation based on sexual difference. They each articulate it differently, but a significant correlation exists in their expression of the role of fantasy as the medium that renders an illusion of idealised love in the sexual relationship. For both, I will argue, this artifice aligns with the concept of Eros, the instigator of romantic enthrallment between two lovers. *Helen in Egypt* openly defies the traditional phallogocentric ideal of Helen by severing her myriad identities, all constructed to sustain masculine desire, from the psyche that speaks throughout the poems. Following Stesichorus' palinode, H.D. attributes the existence of the mythical Helen of Troy to a 'phantom' Helen, fracturing the real woman from the phantasmagorical. The use of a phantom to signify the real Helen's absence from the myth mirrors Lacan's theory of woman's absence within the sexual relation. Both beliefs centre on the understanding that woman functions purely as a fantasy in any relation in which phallic masculinity is at stake.

Lacan: The Sexual Relationship

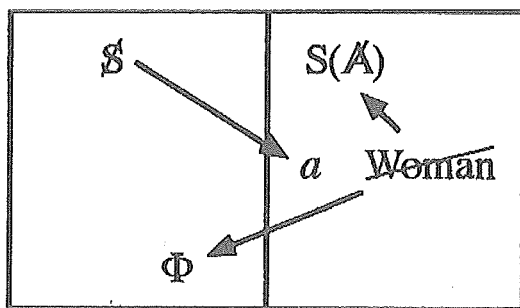
"there's no such thing as a sexual relationship"
(Jacques Lacan)

This statement forms the crux of Lacan's position on the relation between the sexes: there is none. He knows that couples think they relate, particularly on a sexual level, but as man and woman, they do not. The first concept to understand is that, for Lacan, 'man' and 'woman' are signifiers, and as such have no natural relationship to any biological matter as their signified; any being can take up either sexual position (Lacan, 1998, p. 80). Furthermore, as signifiers, they possess "no intrinsic meaning or value, but acquire their meaning or value through their relationship with other terms, the semiotic system as a whole and...with the phallus as master signifier" (Bendle, 2006, p. 80). By acknowledging the precedence of the signifier 'phallus' within a semiotic system, Lacan essentially exposes the 'phallogocentricism' implicit to the construction of meaning; as the master signifier, around which all other signifiers obtain their meaning, it naturalises the dominance of the phallus and thus defines reality (Bendle, 2006, p. 80).

According to Cixous, this function of the phallus extends to organise the entire structure of language into hierarchical binary oppositions that relate "to 'the' couple, man/woman", and, by extension, "activity/passivity" (2004, pp. 348-349). Once sexual identification takes place within the symbolic order, and thus within the orbit of the phallus as master signifier, it is important to acknowledge that the two positions of 'man' and 'woman' become implicitly encumbered with the terms 'active' and 'passive': "this crude polarity that makes matter passive and form the agent that animates it...this animation is nothing other than *a*" (Lacan, 1998, p. 82). As will be seen in the diagram to follow, '*a*', which is a passive animation, a fantasy that man renders and manipulates in his imagination, aligns with 'woman' in the phallic function, as the object of desire. The man "never deals with anything by way of a partner but object *a*...He is unable to attain his sexual partner...this is nothing other than fantasy" (Lacan, 1998, p. 80). Accordingly, *a* represents the 'fantasy woman' that reflects the man's desire, reinforces his masculinity, and affirms his sexual position: this is the work of the 'phallic function'. To explain this more thoroughly, Lacan's distinction of man as 'form' and woman as 'matter' occurs as a result of the castration complex that permits males full entry into the symbolic, which allows them complete access to signifiers which are used to invent the terms of woman's construction as *a*. Signification determines the 'form' of the fantasy that is attached to woman's 'matter', her body. Therefore, the man imagines that he animates matter because he

attaches his fantasy to her body. As such, Lacan concludes, “He animates nothing” (p. 82); it is always only the man’s own fantasy that he perceives. Women, however, only ever enter the symbolic partially, thus her lingering affiliation with matter.

For Lacan, there is a part of woman that always remains outside of the symbolic, a condition he refers to as her being ‘not whole’, and says, “there is always something in her that escapes discourse” (p. 33). In other words, Lacan is acknowledging the excess of women that persists, unrepresentable in the symbolic and thus unknowable to men, in spite of the phallogentric assumption of mastery. Lacan addresses this subjective difference in his diagram of the relation, or indeed the absence of a relation, between men and women: the way the two sexual positions relate to the phallic function.



Lacan's diagram of the sexual relation (Lacan, 1998, p. 78)

On the left side of the table is the male S (split-subject), and “the Φ [the symbolic phallus] that props him up as signifier” (Lacan, 1998, p. 80), which is a signifier without a signified; it signifies a function – the ‘phallic function’. On the right side of the table is the field “of all beings that take on the status of woman” (Lacan, p. 80): a represents *objet petit a*; ~~Woman~~ represents the ‘not whole’ woman; and $S(A)$ represents the subject (in this case, the feminine subject) in relation to the lacking symbolic order. Following the relational arrows, the diagram outlines that a subject who identifies with the side of ‘man’ can only relate to the side of ‘woman’ by way of her incarnation as ‘ a ’, the fantasy described above. Whilst there initially appears to be a contradiction in Lacan’s theory that man and woman are signifiers severed from matter, yet woman as passive is linked to matter, it is this disparity that is addressed by striking the ‘bar’ through ~~Woman~~, as seen in the diagram. This bar works to differentiate the “indispensable” signifier ‘woman’ from the “Woman with a capital W indicating the universal...[which] means that when any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner ‘woman’, it is on the basis...that it grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function” (Lacan, pp. 72-73). Thus, the diagram indicates that the ‘not whole’ ~~Woman~~ has a

relation with Φ , which situates her as passive within the phallic function. However, by recognising the fallibility of the symbolic order, she is able to take up a position in relation to S(A). This latter relation elicits an important implication of the 'not whole' woman. There is always a part of her that remains unrepresented in the symbolic, her excess, and through her relation to S(A) she becomes positioned to embrace her excess which resides beyond the symbolic order.

For Lacan, the impasse of man's relation with *objet petit a* is that, in its non-existence, it can never meet the demand for love that it seems to promise; a promise that always only exists in the man's fantasy. The result of the unfulfilled promise is desire, and the continued relation with *objet petit a* situates it as the cause of desire, not as a desired object itself. Each interaction with *a* has the same result: the demand for love cannot be met by a fantasy that lacks substance and the lingering unfulfilled need sustains desire through its lack of satisfaction.

Lacan's theory of man's relation with *objet petit a* is important when considering the always-changing face of Helen and the way she epitomises the promise of fulfilled desire in each new imagining. Poets, authors, artists, mythological lovers, all construct the version of Helen that fits their ideal of a woman who reinforces their position within the phallic function. For some this means assigning to her those attributes which they associate with passive femininity, they render her as the blameless chaste Helen. Others demand her implication in their sexuality through connotations of the archetypal whore. Lacan explains that for man, "his own desire for the phallus will make its signifier emerge in its residual divergence toward 'another woman' who may signify this phallus in various ways, either as a virgin or as a prostitute" (Lacan, 2006, p. 583). When woman fulfils the requirement of semblance to *objet petit a*, by posing as either the virgin or whore, she completes man's phallic masculine position by restoring to him the phallus that he lost through his castration upon entry into the symbolic. Phantasmagorical Helen has been goddess, scapegoat, victim, demon, wife, mistress, murderess, princess. She is always, however, the cause of desire: *objet petit a*. Helen as subject, as ~~Woman~~ ~~man~~, finally drew first breath as a result of H.D.'s intuition, a pre-emption of the critical theoretical discourse on feminine sexuality and love articulated by Lacan nearly two decades later.

H.D.'s Helen

*Fate, Death, Reintegration, Resurrection? What was she then, if she
was there, at all, in Troy? His answer is unequivocal and final,
"a fountain of water in that desert . . . we died of thirst"*

(Helen in Egypt, p. 47)

The first section of *Helen in Egypt* is "Pallinode", which is "a defence, explanation, or apology" (p. 1) and begins with an explanation that acknowledges the recantations, palinodes, by Stesichorus and Euripides; these recantations were attempts to reinstate Helen after they each denigrated her in their earlier works. In his introduction to H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, Horace Gregory points out that only a fragment of Stesichorus' work has survived the 2600 years since its creation and as such, there remains only a scant sliver of the original recantation as the instigator of H.D.'s retelling (H.D. 1961, p. vii). Gregory also suggests that this lost work was most likely the inspiration for Euripides' *Helen*, which has survived the two millennia intact and thus, provides the bridge between Stesichorus' palinode and H.D.'s. Significantly, for both Stesichorus and Euripides, the defence of Helen places her in Egypt whilst the scandalous 'phantom' of Helen wreaks havoc in Troy; they declare her innocence and virtue by maintaining her severance from the promiscuous "arbitress of strife" (*Helen*, line 703). Where Euripides sought to retract his denigration of Helen in *The Trojan Women* by simply substituting the 'whore' with its counterpart 'virgin', H.D.'s reworking of Stesichorus' palinode actually extracts Helen from the masculine gaze. In this sense, *Helen in Egypt* is a defence against the palinodes themselves. For Euripides to exonerate a reviled woman he could only conceive of representing her in sexual terms filtered by masculine moral judgement (Lindsay, 1974, p. 143).

In *Helen*, the 'apology', or 'recantation', which Euripides proffered Helen, was to fracture her and recast a chaste version as the real Helen, and the 'whore' became the phantom, a wraith. Helen recounts that Hera "Turned into air Alexander's joy of me; Gave him not me, but fashioned like to me A breathing phantom" (*Helen*, lines 32-34). In terms of Lacan's theory, what Hera gave to 'Alexander' – Paris – was his *objet petit a*. The phantom represents Paris' cause of desire, the fantasy that aligns with his 'joy' of her as object, or, again in Lacanian terms, a passive animation. Indeed the entire basis for the relation between Paris and Helen is erotic desire, his desire to possess the most beautiful

woman in the world, and to enjoy the body attached to the fantasy. Subsequently, the Helen he got, according to Euripides' palinode, was "a vain phantasy" (*Helen*, line 36).

In H.D.'s "Pallinode", Helen is still in Egypt and her phantom still carries the imposed persecutions of myth, but this defence attributes Helen a subjectivity that I will argue releases her from the bindings of the phallic function. In terms of Lacan's diagram, Euripides' Helen never breaches the relation she has with Φ , whereas H.D.'s Helen not only disentangles herself from the encumbrance of posing as *objet petit a*, but, as I will argue, she also perceives the lack in the symbolic and, as such, takes up the subject position of ~~Woman~~ in relation to S(A). For the first time, Helen "sees the pattern" and "knows the script"; she understands her own part in the stories and realises she "is the writing". H.D.'s Helen possesses an awareness that the others lack; she retains a connection to the phantom, or senses that it is in some way a projection of her own sexual identity, where Euripides' Helen had none. Helen's connection to the phantom is ambiguous and she interrogates it with ambivalence; she knows it is not a simple distinction.

H.D.'s Helen is unique as she begins her journey alone and at peace in the Egyptian "Amen-temple" where "the old enchantment still holds" (pp. 1-2), liberated from the sexual relations in which she previously circulated. In the absence of a masculine presence Helen is no longer posturing as *objet petit a* and knows "*The Greeks and the Trojans alike fought for an illusion*" (p. 1). In Lacanian terms, the Helen in *Helen in Egypt* functions purely as ~~Woman~~ and her reflective journey demonstrates her transition from having a relation with Φ (the phallic function), to a relation with S(A) (the subject with a relation to the lacking symbolic order). While Helen is alone she is free from the immediate implications of a relation with Φ ; however, this freedom only holds within the confines of her isolation and for this reason she can only achieve that peace if she remains in solitude, and subsequently, severed from love. Thus, Helen's quest becomes a search for an understanding of the illusion of sexual love ('the veil of Cytheraea') that, in turn, depends on reconciling her fragmented identity in order to locate and incorporate those attributes and experiences that are real for her amid the phantasmagorical.

For H.D.'s Helen the phantom's identities are shards of herself, but caught up in a web of idealisation, of romance: they represent the way culture can distort what is real. Susan Friedman explains "For H.D., women give birth to a new self by first destroying the false self created by the culture" (1987, p. 268). Destroying a false self is not a universal

destruction; H.D.'s method is always to distil what culture distorts in order to reclaim the authentic within. Cixous passionately agrees with this approach and says, "We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman" (1976, p. 880). In terms of *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. provides the model Cixous calls for by resurrecting Helen from artifice and attributing her a new, consolidated, subjectivity. From the outset, H.D.'s Helen is very much aware of her place in myth and recalls Euripides' judgement, "*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art*" yet is quick to denounce the power of his scripting "*we will be done forever / with this charm, this evil philtre, / this curse of Aphrodite*" (p. 4). She is aware, but the process of reconciling a new self with the old 'false self' is complex and the shift is slow; Helen "*does not want to forget. She is both phantom and reality*" (p. 3). Friedman further confirms: "Helen cannot begin the process of authentic self-definition until she has come to terms with the identity created for her by the dominant culture" (1987, p. 254). Subsequently, she continues to understand herself in terms of her semblance of *objet petit a* and oscillates between assuming this position, and thus accepting moments of illusory love, or pursuing selfhood outside of masculine desire.

In a reminiscence of desire, Helen asks "Is Fate inexorable?" and returns to the identity she understands:

So being Helen of Troy, whether or not she ever walked upon the ramparts, she flings knowledge away. Let the temple walls flower with "the indecipherable script." It is not necessary to "read" the riddle. The pattern in itself is sufficient and it is beautiful (p. 32)

Whilst posturing as 'Helen of Troy', Helen knows a way to function in ignorance of the 'riddle' she is beginning to decipher as a woman in Egypt. The riddle ('*the indecipherable script*'), which is the phallogocentric symbolic order, if 'read' and interpreted as lacking, threatens to sever her from the possibility of love as she knows it, even if that love is only an illusion. From the beginning, it is however already too late for Helen to return to her "false self" of culture, her awareness makes the reversion impossible. She says, "I am a woman of pleasure, / I spoke ironically into the night" (p. 12). The irony for Helen is that, amid the web of identities and their attributes that have worked against her by confining her to phantasmagorical feminine categories, there reside fragments of her real self. Until she can locate a new identity, born outside of the masculine myths, she cannot attach those attributes to anything stable; she cannot reconcile the false with the authentic.

The exploration of masculine and feminine subjectivity is an important thread that H.D. wove through Helen's journey and, like Lacan, H.D. locates masculinity and femininity outside of biological sexing. This theme is particularly significant for Helen's relation to Achilles because his ambivalent relation with the phallus enables him to have a relation with Helen as ~~Woman~~ from as early as their first encounter in poem four of "Pallinode". DuPlessis confirms that "Achilles breaks with conventional, cultural patterns of maleness. He is 'at odds with the Command'", whereas "Paris simply repeats without transformation his role in the traditional myth" (1990, pp. 417-418). In the final poem of Book Three in "Pallinode", Achilles points out the artifice of Helen's performance in Troy where she functioned as *objet petit a* not only for Paris, but for all of the men who fought in the battle. The phantom appeared like a mirage in the desert, where, he says, "I can see you still, a mist / or a fountain of water / in that desert; we died of thirst" (p. 48). Here, Achilles identifies the phantom who all men, Trojans and Greeks alike, only saw in terms of their fantasy, which in reality left their 'thirst' unquenched, and their desire unsatisfied. Helen's collision with Achilles is crucial to her developing subjectivity because he is the first to confirm the disparity of self she is experiencing in Egypt. He is the first to see her outside of her semblance of *objet petit a*; with the sea-enchantment in his eyes, he "knew not yet, Helen of Sparta, / knew not Helen of troy, / knew not Helena, hated of Greece" (p. 14).

But Achilles, too, is split; he wavers between his furious battle-wrought past, and his post-Troy present, in which H.D. presents him aimlessly wandering beyond the Homeric version of his death and afterlife in Hades (Grimal, 1996, p. 8). In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters Achilles in "Book 11: The Kingdom of the Dead", in Hades – "the House of Death" (1996, line 539). In this meeting, they briefly exchange post-war stories before Odysseus parts company with Achilles who remains amongst "the breathless dead" (Homer, line 558). In *Helen in Egypt*, the site of Achilles and Helen's meeting occurs after the war, but outside of the Homeric conclusion; instead, H.D.'s Achilles is "famished and tempest-driven" (p. 7). Achilles says, "Helena, cursed of Greece, / I have seen you upon the ramparts, / no art is beneath your power" (p. 16). Here, Achilles is reacting to Helen's semblance of the 'phantom' he remembers from Troy. Helen explains:

"it was he, Amen dreamed of all this
phantasmagoria of Troy,

it was dream and a phantasy";
O Thetis, O sea-mother,
I prayed, as he clutched my throat

with his fingers' remorseless steel,
let me go out, let me forget,
let me be lost (p. 17)

For H.D., Thetis as the "sea-mother" represents a resilience in the feminine akin to Sappho's, a comparison she elucidates by alluding to her earlier essay *The Wise Sappho* in which she says, "she [Sappho] is the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken" (1982, p. 67). The 'sea-enchancement' in Achilles' eyes enables him to relate to Helen as ~~Woman~~, whereas the unconquerable 'King of Myrmidons' (Achilles' phallic identity) recognises the phantom that, for him, signifies legions lost in the battle that was always for nothing. For Achilles, the phantom was always vapid and this meeting restores his anger. Achilles' radical shifts in perspective are important for Helen in exposing the phallic gaze; she feels his "fingers' remorseless steel" that seek to throttle the phantom just moments after he built a fire to warm the ~~Woman~~. Here, Achilles' shifts show the result of him alternately identifying as the hyper-phallic 'King of Myrmidons' who only deals with the feminine as a passive animation, hence the phantom. Or, when identifying as Thetis' son, Achilles moves away from the phallic function, demonstrating a masculinity that, for Cixous, is "capable of imagining the woman who would hold out against oppression" (1976, p. 879). The crucial point here is that the Helen in *Helen in Egypt* is at all times the 'real' Helen, the not-whole ~~Woman~~, it is only the gaze that *perceives* her that shifts within the poems. H.D. does not give voice to the phantom. Furthermore, Achilles' voice and gaze inform Helen throughout her journey as she learns to read the script, to decipher the "*metallic glitter*" of phallic masculinity and distinguish it from a masculine that perceives the feminine as ~~Woman~~, through sea-enchanted eyes (p. 35). Helen says, "no, I was not instructed, but I "read" the script, / I read the writing when he seized my throat, / this was his anger" (p. 25). For Helen, this distinction reveals, and confirms her growing understanding that she is not 'instructed' by the phallocentric discourse that constructed her cultural identity; she is distinct from the phantom, not simply its categorical opposite within the phallic function.

Where Euripides portrays sexual difference in distinctly fixed terms that correspond to biological sex, H.D. suggests a more fluid conceptualisation that explores masculine and feminine attributes whereby the pretence of phallic masculinity's dominance is logically arbitrary. In *Helen in Egypt* H.D. identifies two representations of the phallus that props up the male subject: the assumed masculine authority of the 'host', or the 'command', which signifies the active dominance of military power, and ~~Woman~~'s semblance of *objet*

petit a, which signifies the phallus by performing his fantasy – the passive animation – and thus reinforces his phallic masculine position. In the text, both of these props align with a governing deity, an affiliation that works by alluding to the phallic function within each reference; the masculine deity is the “Absolute”, a conflated “Nameless-of-many-Names” that manifests variously as Amen, Zeus, or Proteus (pp. 103-105). The feminine deity that signifies the phallus is Aphrodite, “Goddess of Desire” (Graves, 1992, p. 49), the primary incarnation of *objet petit a* in the sexual relation. H.D. also uses a conflation of goddesses from multiple mythologies to signify a resistant pre-hellenic feminine deity that opposes phallic authority, reclaims Aphrodite, and, in doing so, begins to break down the differences that previously upheld the masculine presumption of authority. In Book Six of “Leukè” H.D. ultimately collapses all divisions:

Isis is Cypris (Cytheraea) and Isis is Thetis. Amen-Zeus is the father of Isis-Thetis-Aphrodite (Cypris)...Cypris, Thetis, Nephthys, Isis, Paris. Proteus, the legendary King of Egypt, as we have learned before, takes many shapes. Could he “manifest as Achilles?” If so...could he manifest as Paris? Then, could the two...merge into one, and that One, the Absolute? This last question is implicit but not formulated by the final phrase or strophe, “Amen begot Amor.” (p. 178)

What is most significant in this passage is the emphasis on exposing the instability of those signifiers upon which difference depends, and telescoping myriad allusions into one concise statement: “*Amen begot Amor.*”: manmade love. By the end of the passage it is clear that Amen points to phallic masculinity (‘the Absolute’), a single concept with infinite signifiers, and Amor, which is the Latin name for Cupid of Roman mythology and synonymous with Eros of Greek mythology, constitutes erotic love as a signifier and thus as cultural, which for H.D. is implicitly artificial. As such, the statement becomes an echo of Lacan’s theory of the sexual relation that “cannot be written” (1998, p. 35). If a signifier ‘Amen’ begot another signifier ‘Amor’, erotic love, it too functions as merely another signifier that points to something that must exist only in the symbolic in which “there is no such thing as Woman” (Lacan, 1998, p. 72). In other words, the instant that a relation between the sexes is articulated and thus governed by the symbolic, it simultaneously enters into the phallic function, and in doing so, the male subject stipulates the signifiers that render his imaginary ‘lover’.

In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen knows she has been scripted. She rejects its power to instruct her, and thus moves from having a relation with Φ to a relation with S(A): “*So Helen remembers her part in the greatest drama of Greece and of all time. She seems almost to*

... speak by rote, she has grown into her part. But she breaks off, as it were, from the recorded drama to remind us of the unrecorded" (p. 234). Whereas Euripides split Helen into two opposing types, H.D. destabilises such categorisation and crystallises Helen's new relation with the lack in the symbolic by first expanding and questioning the scope of Helen's cultural identities: "Was Troy lost for a kiss ... was Helen daemon or Goddess? ... was Helen another symbol ... a suspect stranger from Greece, / is she a slave or a queen? ... a Grecian harlot ... was Aphrodite's power / nothing after all?" (pp. 230-237). These lines all point to Euripides' attacks on Helen that have subsequently become embedded in her myth. According to Lindsay, portrayals of the "cold core of her calculated coquettishness and vanity" (1974, p. 143) directly descend from the way Euripides depicts her as the opportunistic whore in *The Trojan Women*. H.D. rejects all of the cultural identities in their independent functionality in favour of a new Helen, emergent with the knowledge that:

Paris before Egypt, Paris after,
is Eros ...

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

...
the Sphinx is seen,
the Beast is slain
and the Phoenix-nest

reveals the innermost
key or the clue to the rest
of the mystery (p. 303)

The Sphinx signifies the riddle, the symbolic, which has now been exposed. The Phoenix-nest denotes Helen's understanding that what remains is a phase of resurrection in order to decipher the rest of the mystery: a way to love that transcends the 'veil of Cytheraea'.

Mourning Eros

Is this Helen actually that Helen?

...

Fate, Death, Reintegration, Resurrection?

...

*"the sea-roads lie between
you and the answer"*

(Helen in Egypt, p. 47)

In chapter one Helen grappled with her sexual identity, vacillating between her cultural identities and embracing her excess – the position of a not-whole ~~Woman~~ with a relation to the lacking symbolic; she deciphered the “Amen-script” as the riddle of phallogentric discourse; and she unveiled the connection between love catalysed by Eros, and death. While these developments reposition Helen in terms of plausible subject positions, for H.D. she cannot complete the restructuring of her identity until she recognises what she has lost in the process. As such, for Helen to return to a reality in which she can build new reciprocal attachments, she must first work through a phase of mourning, thus allowing her to transcend her stagnant attachment with her lost ideals and be psychically reborn.

Throughout this chapter, I will explore the way Helen works through loss by distilling her fragmented identity in a process of remembrance in which she interrogates and reinterprets her past attachments. These memory sequences in *Helen in Egypt* are an important element in H.D.’s approach to Helen’s unification; they constitute her means of gently detaching herself from her losses so that she can distinguish the real from the phantasmagorical. Also crucial is the way these remembrances take place within an unconscious space removed from both temporal and spatial reality, a space that releases Helen from the demands imposed by others. Subsequently, it is within this out-of-time landscape that Helen processes her experiences of love, experiences affiliated with her cultural identity, the phantom, and understands them as manifestations of idealisations: the fantasy love signified by Eros. Furthermore, by renouncing artifice Helen also risks simultaneously relinquishing future possibilities of love, as she knows it. Thus, Helen’s

return to temporal reality – the completion of mourning – depends upon her ability to recognise alternative ways to love through unsexed inter-subjective relations, which, in turn, support her ultimate quest for a unified identity.

In order to elucidate the implications of loss and mourning on Helen's development, it is first necessary to establish the scope of these concepts in accordance with Freud's 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholia*. Freud's expression of how mourning normally functions as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, [or] an ideal" (2008, p. 162) pertains succinctly to the treatment of Helen's loss of Eros: an abstraction of the idealisation it represents. Freud further allows that mourning "may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object ... a loss of a more ideal kind" (pp. 163-164), whereby the loved object may be a displaced attachment to something that represents a loved person or ideal. Helen's displaced attachment is evident in her reluctance to abandon her cultural identity, as the signifier for her prior experience of being loved; it represents the ideal of love that she senses is an illusion. Freud also emphasises that mourning involves "grave departures from the normal attitude to life" and concludes, "after a lapse of time it will be overcome" (p. 162). Among these 'grave departures', he includes a loss of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, and the turning away from "every active effort that is not connected with thoughts of the dead", or the lost love-object (Freud, p. 162). Again, all of these elements are present in *Helen in Egypt* as Helen retreats into her unconscious, rejects temporal reality, and immerses in a society derived purely from her memories. This immersion in an internal realm of remembrance is a critical stage in the mourning process that Freud refers to as an 'exclusive devotion' to that which is lost to the realm of the living. Nalini Bhushan (2008) discusses this stage extensively and identifies a pattern of detachments within Freudian mourning. The first detachment extracts the mourner from the reality in which the lost love-object no longer exists in order to "recreate the physically dead beloved as an internal object", as a result, Bhushan says, "love escapes annihilation" (p. 59). Bhushan further interprets this stage as "necessary for the 'emptying out' of every memory and hope" that the mourner clings to (p. 60). Eventually, the memories will fail the reality test – the ego's-process of qualifying, or confirming, the truth of a lost object's continued existence in the *external* world, as opposed to the mourner's *internal* world of memory – and thus assist a gentle return of the mourner to reality. The second stage of detachment Bhushan describes is a direct consequence of the reality test winning out against the devotional fixation; she says that a shift occurs during the memory work and that within "this repetition, reality intrudes, gradually and

imperceptibly, but inexorably” (p. 61). The second detachment is a move away from the love-object that has become empty to the mourner, thus facilitating their return to the realm of the living and the passage of time. As such, the temporaneous nature of mourning establishes its function as a *phase* that involves loss, reality testing through remembrance, relinquishing the attachment to a love-object, the formation of a new attachment, and finally the return to temporal reality.

Further to Freud’s initial articulation of mourning as a process aiming at cathexis of libidinal energy from the lost object to a new one, his model also offers a way to examine emergent subjectivities in terms of the new ones transcending the old. Both Butler (2006) and Clewell (2004) emphasise a crucial development of Freud’s original theory in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) whereby he revised his view on mourning to include the incorporation of lost love-objects as fundamental to the development of the ego, and thus as integral to achieving autonomous subjectivity. In this sense, the unification and liberation of the subject’s selfhood supersedes the formation of a new attachment as the ultimate aim of mourning and as such becomes an indispensable process for rebirth of self. Clewell argues that “Freudian mourning involves less a lament for the passing of a unique other, and more a process geared toward restoring a certain economy of the subject” (2004, p. 47). She further explains:

the mourner attempts to reclaim a part of the self that has been projected onto the other, a part of the self necessary to the construction of the subject’s self-image as a complete and autonomous being. ... [therefore] Freud’s essay [*The Ego and the Id*] provides an important framework for thinking about the trace of the lost other that creates the character of the ego. (pp. 47-56)

The idea that Freud’s model for mourning provides an appropriate path by which to explore transitional loss, as opposed to death related grief, echoes his own insight into its applicability to contexts of selfhood. Clewell recalls Freud’s belief that prescribing “mourning as a mode of personal and social recovery” could assist subjects who failed to recognise the temporality of natural and cultural phenomena, and that he acknowledged the potential that a phase of reality testing, detachment and temporal attribution of losses would offer, enabling subjects to “start life anew” (pp. 57-58).

Judith Butler further discusses the expansion of Freud’s initial theory, which positioned mourning as distinct to melancholia, in terms of gender identity formation, and makes a connection between the work of mourning and a subject’s progress toward creating new

structures of identity (2006, pp. 78-84). The revised discussion presented in *The Ego and the Id* is important, Butler says, because “the identification with lost loves characteristic of melancholia becomes the precondition for the work of mourning. The two processes, originally conceived as oppositional, are now understood as integrally related aspects of the grieving process” (p. 84). In light of Butler’s deduction, it is thus possible to consider Freud’s model for mourning afresh. The phase that initially encompassed loss, reality testing, relinquishment of attachment to the love-object, formation of a new attachment, and a return to reality and temporaneous existence, should instead substitute the stage of object cathexis (the new attachment) with one of identification and incorporation. In other words, rather than viewing loss as a void whose imperative is to be filled with another external attachment, the mourner retracts and incorporates those aspects of themselves that were previously *invested* in loving the lost object/ideal, thus restoring to the subject’s new identity structure the excess that it was previously lacking.

Eros Lost

did Ares bequeath his arrows

alike to Eros, to Eris?

(*Helen in Egypt*, p. 183)

In H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*, Helen’s initial ambivalence to the loss of her idealisation establishes the melancholic precondition for mourning. For Freud, ambivalence to loss reveals an underlying ambivalence toward love relationships and such manifestations arise not only as a response to death, but also recall “all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour, or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence” (2008, pp. 169-170). In this sense, the ambivalence of melancholia crosses over from the realm of specified grief into a sphere that reflects a subject’s tumultuous experience of the sexual relation in general. For H.D.’s Helen, this would include her experiences, especially those attributed to her ‘phantom’ cultural identity, of persecution for her sexuality and existential negation within sexual relationships. However, her melancholia would simultaneously evoke her experiences of feeling loved, or at least desired, within those same relationships, thus resulting in mixed connotations for her when recalling idealised love. Freud further elaborates that “This conflict of ambivalence, the origin of which lies now more in actual experience, now more in constitution, must

not be neglected among the conditioning factors in melancholia” (p. 170). In other words, the subject’s conflict derives partly from reality and partly from fantasy, yet the conflation of the two renders the subject’s final response to the loss. When the ambivalence is resolved, the mourner is ready to commence the productive work of mourning. As such, for Helen to enter into the mourning phase that is fundamental to her progress, she must first resolve her ambivalence toward Eros.

In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen’s ambivalence manifests in her inconsistent response to her new relation with Achilles. Helen begins by calling him to her in the third poem of “Pallinode” and says, “I stricken, / forsaken draw him to me, / ... your own invincible, unchallenged Sire, / Lord of your Legions, King of Myrmidons, / unconquerable, ... / Achilles;” (pp. 5-6). This invocation produces their first meeting and Helen’s automatic impulse is to affix to him his legend; she immediately allies him to her ideal of a hero, comparable to her prior lovers, thus reinforcing her continued attachment to Eros within the realm of the Amen-temple where she says, “the old enchantment holds” (p. 2). The old enchantment, a phrase repeated several times throughout the work, indicates the distortion of reality by the patriarchal social structure. At this early stage, Helen is content to claim ignorance; she is still in isolation in Egypt and only evokes Eros through fantasy, she is not yet ready to shatter her peace for the purpose of authenticity. The eighth poem of Book Two reveals Helen’s fantasy explicitly when she again calls Achilles to her and dismisses doubts that promise to fracture her idealisation. This poem shows a partial shift in Helen’s conviction to her own delusion; in this call to Achilles, she makes the connection between fantasy and desire by initially invoking Eros to assist her in maintaining the illusion, “O Eros of flaming wings, / ... / let my heart be filled with peace, / let me draw him back to this place” (p. 32). The poem also demonstrates Helen’s ambivalence as she simultaneously acknowledges and disregards the paradox she faces in upholding her fantasy; “I ask not, nor care to know / what is or is not the answer” (p. 33). She seeks peace and she wants to claim him, but she also knows that to unravel his myth and gain knowledge would undermine the structure of fantasy that rests on her acquiescence to ignorance. Helen continues to weigh Achilles’ myth:

whether he flouted his power, —

while women fell, as the scythe
of his visored glance swept them over;
whether he laughed as they fell;

whether he found, here and there,
a girl for a change in pleasure

...

whether he razed a city,
a woman, or wore a crown

unearned by his merit –

...

Amen-Zeus, let me not ask,
but claim him and know the Sun
hidden behind the sun of our visible day. (pp. 33-34)

The above section of the poem aligns desiring Achilles with death. To say that “women fell, as the scythe / of his visored glance swept them over” indicates a veiled peril to women. The scythe invokes images of the Reaper, a symbol of temporal death and therefore alludes to Thanatos, yet the surrounding lines also indicate this as a figurative death that is produced by the women’s response to his ‘visored glance’. In this sense, the poem casts doubt on Achilles’ conscious involvement and positions the death more as an affective result of his lack of desire to have them signify the phallus. A ‘visored glance’ further suggests that he is concealing or masking his impression of them, thus denying them existence within the realm of fantasy. Helen’s plea at the end of the poem to “know the Sun / hidden behind the sun of our visible day” is therefore a reversal of the way the other women have approached Achilles; the Sun that is hidden indicates an excess of Achilles that is hidden behind the visible legend, and that Helen accepts must remain hidden. Thus, there is a clear paradox working in the passage; whilst Helen claims evasion of answers, it is actually the constructed myth, the artifice that she is rejecting.

In Book Three of “Pallinode”, Helen questions her desire to claim Achilles and says:

I would rather forget,
I would rather forget,

...

And do I care,
do I care greatly
to keep him here eternally?

I was happier alone,
why did I call him to me?
must I forever look back?

...

O do not turn, do not turn,

go, follow the ways of the sea; (p. 35-36)

By retracting her previous plea to claim Achilles, these lines confirm the ambivalence present in Helen's psyche; she is torn between wanting to love Achilles and her developing distrust of Eros. Her questions further demonstrate an attempt to ascertain a distinction between habitual desire and her deeper concerns with autonomy. Unable to discern her preferred outcome, Helen instead plays a game of chance by allowing Achilles' actions, to either turn and be with her, or leave, to determine her fate. Helen ratifies her concern with the risk that Achilles presents when she contemplates:

can one weigh the thousand ships
against one kiss in the night?
Helena? who is she?

... the deathless name,

I must fight for Helena,
lest the lure of his sea-eyes
endanger my memory (p. 37)

To weigh the thousand ships against a kiss alludes to the myth in which the ships are a manifestation of Menelaus' possessive love of Helen: love defined by ownership. The lines compare the idea of Menelaus' love to that other love aligned with a single kiss, whether this points to the kiss of Paris or Achilles is not clear; however, the important distinction resides within Helen's conflation of existence as a possession, and existence as an embodiment of fantasy. Both ways of being depend on her preservation of the phantom's identity. The deathless name further points to her cultural identity, which she is not yet ready to relinquish, and Achilles' 'sea-eyes' work in opposition to his previous visored glance and indicate an authentic sight, which threatens to disrupt her devotion to remembering the ideal.

Helen's ambivalence is resolved when she discovers that the contradiction resides not in her own desire for love, but within the artifice innate to Eros: she finally understands the inherent paradoxical correlation between Eros and Thanatos, a realisation that catalyses her ambivalence into loss. Helen asks "*Is the 'veil of Cytheraea' or of Love, Death? Is the disguise of Death or the 'veil' of Déath, Love*" (p. 45). This revelation is important for Helen's progress as it marks the moment that she moves into the earliest stage of mourning and detaches herself from temporal reality, where the love-ideal no longer holds, in an attempt to retain her attachment to the fantasy love that now persists only in her memories.

Into the Chrysalis: Leukè

The dream is over. Remembrance is taking its place

(Helen in Egypt, p. 109)

With the loss established, Helen enters a phase of repetitive remembrance; she begins her journey by delving into her unconscious and seeks to reconstruct her loss by revisiting the phantom's, Helen of Troy's, relationships. In *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud explains:

The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments from this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises ... This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish psychosis. The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its behest cannot at once be obeyed. The task is now carried out bit by bit ... all the time existence of the lost object is continued in the mind. Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it is accomplished. (2008, p. 163)

The important issue in this passage is that for the devotion to the lost ideal to hold out against the intrusions of reality, it is essential that the mourner continually leap from memory to memory so that when one becomes empty, the ideal can be re-imagined within the space of another. Helen initially experiences this test of reality whilst she is content in the unconscious realm of the Amen-temple where she has "all-time to remember" (p. 11). The opening prose of poem five in "Pallinode" states that, in this space, "*Time values have altered, present is past, past is future. The whole heroic sequence is over, forgotten, re-lived, forgotten again*" (p. 57). This attention to the temporal flux surrounding Helen is important, it indicates her departure from reality as she clings to her lost object and also suggests that she is replacing reality with a 'hallucinatory wish psychosis', or delusion, in order to preserve the fantasy. Achilles, however, shatters Helen's peace by demanding that she explain her relation to the phantom: "how are Helen in Egypt / and Helen upon the ramparts, / together yet separate? / ... I am not rapt apart / as you in this Amen-temple" (p. 63). Achilles' demand forces Helen to confront the gap between what is real ('Helen in Egypt') and what is fantasy (Helen upon the ramparts). Thus, his demand represents reality intruding on her denial, which instigates her struggle to maintain the delusion. As a result, Helen asks "have I imprisoned myself / in my contemplation?" (p.

89), indicating that the reality testing has won out within the isolation of Egypt and emptied it of sustenance for the lost ideal. Subsequently, for Helen to continue to retain her ideal, she must move to a new memory where her love ideal remains intact.

Leaving the depleted realm of the Amen-temple, Helen pursues her lost ideal in the second section of *Helen in Egypt*, “Leukè”, where “*she would reconstruct the Greek past. ...she would re-assess that first experience*” (p. 112). The ‘first experience’ is the phantom’s relationship with Paris and it provides the strongest link Helen possesses, within her memories, of Eros. Moving through her unconscious dreamscape in poem six of Book One in “Leukè”, Helen is passing between memories, and says, “reality opened before me, / I had come back; / I retraced the thorny path / but the thorns of rancour and hatred / were gone” (p. 116). The eradication of rancour and hatred shows the strength of the psyche to alter perception in memories in order to sustain the ideal. For Helen, the wish to secure a unified identity overrides the shared “phantasmagoria of Troy” (p. 17) and she fantasises a reconciled setting in which to resurrect the memory of Paris. “Troy? Greece? / they were one and I was one, / I was laughing with Paris; / so we cheated the past, / I had escaped – Achilles” (p. 116). In this sense, Helen’s struggle to retain her attachment to idealised love propels her further away from reality as she distorts her real memories of the discord between Greece and Troy, and attributes the war to Eris – goddess of strife and sister to Ares. Helen asks, “Was it Paris who caused the war? / ...or was it Thetis?... / Eris; so the apple was cast, / so the immortals woke to petty strife / ... even the gods’ plans / are shaped by another – / Eros? Eris?” (pp. 111-115). Whilst the fantasy immediately supports Helen’s delusion, it also shows that the work of mourning is occurring; the more unreal her constructions become, the harder it will be for her to resist the intrusions of reality. In this instance, Helen’s restoration of Paris can still only reflect the identity of the phantom as she functioned in a specific moment with him. To Paris, Helen was always fantasy, his *objet petit a*, and as such, the test of reality will again prevail. Helen knows, “*if, “in life”, she is to progress at all*” (p. 117), she must admit the incongruity of achieving selfhood within the very relation that fractures her.

As Helen invokes past lovers in her memory an important aspect of her rendering their integrity is the way she allots to them a voice. In her attempt to retain the ideal it is necessary that she imagines that they still exist in distinction to her and their individual voices achieve that aim. As such, Helen’s return to her relation with Paris manifests

through his retelling of the “story the harpers tell” (p. 129). Initially, Paris reminds Helen of her cultural identities and repeatedly asks, “Who will forget Helen?” (pp. 121-127). These questions frame a post mortem of Helen of Sparta, Helen of Troy, and Helen of Dentritis – all now dead within the culture of temporal reality. Accordingly Paris says, “but the harpers / never touch their strings / to name Helena and Death. / ... I am the first in all history / to say, she died, died, died / when the walls fell” (pp. 130-131). The Helen that Paris claims died is the phantom whose existence ceased to function once the war ended. However he then attempts to resurrect her in the form of another fantasy and invokes their echo within Adonis and Cytheraea, thus reconfiguring Helen as Aphrodite (p. 140). As Paris speaks Helen’s unconscious and desperate attempt to cling to fantasy he once more implores, “we alone could compel the Fates, / we chosen of Cytheraea; / can you forget the pact?” (p. 142). Here, Paris is attempting to retain a connection with Helen but the delusion is fracturing under the weight of reality; the prior explication of the phantom’s death carries the implication that Helen must acknowledge the simultaneous end to her functional relation with Paris. As such, she incorporates the attributes of Aphrodite that she identifies with and detaches herself from the ideal represented by Paris’ desire:

But now, she has taken on the attributes of another. True, Paris had referred to himself and Helen as ‘Adonis and Cytheraea.’ But now he turns on her, ‘do you dare impersonate Her?’ Helen is leaving him. We feel that she has renounced, with her ‘silver sandals,’ all claim to the world and her past affiliations with it. She walks, ‘barefoot toward the door.’ (p. 145)

This reflection from the beginning of the eighth poem in Book Three of “Leukè” marks an important shift in Helen’s progress toward relinquishing her ideal of love in the sexual relation. Paris has exposed his lack of intimate knowledge of Helen as a woman by alternately asking her to resume her old posture as the goddess of lust and then attacking her for his perception of her semblance to his fantasy. For Paris, the possibility that Helen resembles his *objet petit a*, yet withdraws the implied promise of love from his grasp, is beyond the scope of his conceptualisation of his lover. To appear as the fantasy, but not perform it, is a contradiction that he cannot accept. Thus, Helen sees Paris’ lack and the test of reality again succeeds in breaking through her devotion to her lost ideal.

Again, Helen moves through her unconscious and recalls the more remote memory of Theseus, but this time the memory reflects her shift and progress toward reconfiguring

old attachments to encompass her developing conceptualisation of the ideal's failure to hold. In order for Helen to begin the journey back to reality and resurrection, she still needs to consolidate her own identity, afresh, and liberated from the desire of lovers. In Book Four of "Leukè" Theseus speaks and recounts his past affiliation with Helen. Now much older than at their first encounter, he takes her in, he shelters and comforts her, "do not fear, I will not immolate you / on an altar; all myth, the one reality / dwells here;" (p. 151). Theseus is offering Helen a space in which she can resurrect after her existential negation by Paris. By constructing Helen as Aphrodite, Paris did 'immolate' her; he substituted a mythical deity for the woman, and in doing so, sacrificed the woman. Theseus, on the other hand, reassures Helen that she is safe to reconcile her myth with her reality without fear of surrendering any aspect of herself necessary to render her whole. Theseus says, "It is one thing, Helen, to slay death, / it is another thing to come back / through the intricate windings of the Labyrinth / ... / come closer, draw nearer to Theseus, / until the heart-storm is over" (pp. 157-159). Thus, it is here with Theseus that Helen can finally approach the task of incorporating the phantom's attributes and narrative into her real self, and here that "*together they will forget and together they will remember*" (p. 153). Helen recognises the safety offered by Theseus and welcomes his guidance:

this is no easy thing
to understand, O god-father;
draw close, draw closer,

take my hands in your hands,
teach me to remember,
teach me not to remember. (p. 186)

Helen's request to Theseus to teach her 'not to remember' also demonstrates that she is approaching a point in mourning where detachment from the love-object is becoming tangible to her psyche. Helen is developing a stronger desire to *process* her loss, she knows the work she is involved in resides in memories, as opposed to a delusion of reality, and this means that her attachment to fantasy, and its influence on her, is rapidly diminishing. This is important because it elucidates another shift in Helen's awareness and indicates she is now consciously ready to confront her loss with the specific aim of transcending it. Helen now willingly welcomes her chrysalis as a space where she can sort through and consolidate the remaining fragments prior to rebirth.

The tender sanction that Theseus provides for Helen is crucial to her successful progression through mourning and subsequent regeneration as her grieving subsides.

Where Paris brought death in his urgent demand and claim for love, Theseus loves with solace, patience, guidance, and protection and says she is “wavering / like a Psyche / with half-dried wings” (p. 166). This allusion to Psyche is pertinent in its ability to signify the butterfly, the soul, the mind, and the mythological consort of Eros. Association to Psyche therefore imbues Helen with characteristics that imply that her transformation is working to realign her excess to her subjectivity and, furthermore, implicates this function as essential to her progress. In other words, by attributing Helen with all that is associated with Psyche, H.D. indicates that the work of Helen’s restoration relies on her re-emergence from a chrysalis with a reconciled sense of her psychic self. Theseus soothes her:

Rest here, shall I draw out
the low couch, nearer the brazier,
or will you lie there,

against the folds of purple
by the wall? you tremble,
can you stand? walk then,

O, sleep-walker; is this fleece
too heavy? here is soft woven wool;
wrapped in this shawl, my butterfly,

my Psyche, disappear into the web,
the shell, re-integrate,
nor fear to recall

the shock of the iron-Ram,
the break in the Wall,
the flaming Towers,

shouting and desecration
of the alters; you are safe here;
remember if you wish to remember,

or forget . . . (pp. 170-171)

Here, in the fifth poem of Book Five in “Leukè”, Theseus’ lack of presumption (he asks ‘shall I’, ‘or will you’) in his nurturance of Helen shows her an alternative to the force of Paris’ destructive desire. Theseus supports Helen and recognises the trauma she needs space to overcome. He assists her by building her a cocoon (‘wrapped in this shawl’) in which the transformation can occur. Importantly, Theseus refrains from attempting to sway Helen, or construct her; there is no imposition on her to perform his fantasy. Instead, Theseus acknowledges Helen as a woman both in body, by attending to her

physical comfort ('Rest here', 'you tremble'), and in psyche by giving her choices and freedom to retreat (she can choose to 'disappear into the web' to 're-integrate'), even from him, while she contemplates her past. Theseus' comfort in giving Helen privacy and freedom are important signals of his knowledge that she is distinct from him.

The Phoenix-nest

Helen must be re-born, that is, her soul must return wholly to her body.

(Helen in Egypt, p. 162)

The final stage in Freudian mourning requires the mourner to re-emerge from the realm of their hallucinatory wish psychosis, the fantasy sphere of remembrance, and resume existence in reality. For Bhushan, this means "returning the mourning individual back to objective reality, the material world of actual physical objects, other living [beings]", and that is "accessible to the senses" (2008, p. 60). Further, Bhushan says "any satisfactory account of mourning must take seriously the ... existential character of mourning" which she says "is an irreducibly subjective dimension" (2008, pp. 66-67). In other words, the work of mourning ultimately leads the mourner back to reality, but upon their return, they possess a revised conceptualisation of existence and of their own subjectivity. This view is consistent with the shift in Helen's self awareness that results from her relinquishment of Eros. Where Helen initially conceived of herself in terms of her relation to the phallus, her posture as *objet petit a* within the sexual relation, by the end of mourning she has a new understanding of herself that is no longer defined by fantasy. As such, Helen's restructured identity grows into a unified selfhood: severed from idealised love, she is distinct from her phantom's exclusive orbit of lovers.

While she is in her mourning chrysalis, Helen explores her remaining associations with ideal love. She has now emptied her most significant memories and the reality tests have brought her to the brink of her return, but she still harbours traces of the ideal in a network of memories that work by abstraction to represent the ideal. Freud explains that the built up reservoir of "innumerable single impressions" means that detachment "is not a process that can be accomplished in a moment, but must certainly be...slow and gradual" (p. 175). Freud stresses that the attachment is further "strengthened by a

thousand links, to the ego” and concludes that withdrawal occurs bit by bit until severance is eventually achieved (pp. 174-175). In Book Six of “Leukè” Helen follows these links to uncover the residual stains of the ideal that cling to her ego. Yet Helen’s imperative is clear, and Theseus guides her through the confusion: “Helen – Helen – Helen – / there was always another and another and another; / the rose has many petals” (p. 187). Theseus is helping Helen to follow the organic web of associations in order to confront every memory and ensure her resurrection. Theseus traces a path, incorporating Helen’s “father, brother, son, lover, / sister, husband and child” (p. 187). These steps Theseus takes to guide Helen finally telescope the relations into a single figure of a child melded to herself, “beyond all other, the Child, / the child in the father, / the child in the mother, / the child-mother, yourself / O Helena, pause and remember, / lest you return to that other / and flame out, incandescent” (p. 187).

Helen answers and recalls further associations, a response that leads Theseus to sort them all:

Thus, thus, thus,
as day, night,
as wrong, right,

as dark, light,
as water, fire,
as earth, air,

as storm, calm,
as fruit, flower,
as life, death,

as death, life;
the rose deflowered,
the rose re-born;

Helen in Egypt,
Helen at Home,
Helen in Hellas forever. (p. 190)

Here, Theseus’ role as Helen’s guide is crucial. The one flaw that Bhushan identifies in Freud’s model of mourning is the lack of societal involvement in the mourner’s journey toward overcoming their loss (2008, p. 66). Without guidance, Helen’s memory work lost focus; Theseus’ assistance gently directed her back to the natural pathways of the mind, and in doing so, he restored order to her exploration. “Leukè” concludes, “*So Helen is at peace*” (p.193): she has completed the phase of reality testing, and the productive work of

mourning is accomplished. Helen tells Theseus “no, god-father, / Paris will never find me; / I reflect, I re-act, I re-live” (p. 196). She is aware of the cycle she has now completed and the final prose reflection of “Leukè” confirms, “*through the power and tenderness of Theseus, ‘it was finished’*” (p. 206).

“Eidolon” is the last section of *Helen in Egypt* and concentrates on Helen’s new understanding of her past that she reinterprets from her new perspective. Book One begins by confirming Helen’s return to temporal reality; “*Now after the reconciliation with time, Greek time, (through the council and guidance of Theseus), Helen is called back to Egypt*” (p. 208). With the mourning phase complete, the newborn Helen says, “I am awake, / I see things clearly; it is dawn” (p. 255). Helen is now in a position to reassess her relation with Achilles. Liberated from the fantasy idealisation of romantic love, she can finally attempt to decipher new ways to love, uninhibited by the artifice of Eros.

Love

*do you hear me? do I whisper?
there is a voice within me,
listen – let it speak for me*

(Helen in Egypt, p. 175)

While H.D. and Lacan both resist the possibility of love between the sexes, they do finally suggest that if two beings perceive that the symbolic is lacking, and renounce the phallus as master signifier, there exists a potential for recognition, which forms the basis of intersubjective relations. Furthermore, it is from this basis that subjects can recognise in each other a shared unconscious knowledge and mutual courage in bearing the intolerable uncertainty of existence. By embracing a not-whole subjectivity, two subjects are thus able to recognise in each other a certain truth of being that the symbolic order otherwise masks. In this chapter, I will argue that in *Helen in Egypt* H.D. renders authentic love as the manifestation of subject-to-subject relations, rather than the fantasy construct of sexual attachments. Whilst the newly reborn Helen has reconciled her view of herself as mother/sister/and daughter, instead of fantasy lover, H.D. ultimately collapses all familial distinctions, instead favouring an all-encompassing triadic relationship: a structural device characteristic of her works (Kloepfer, 1990, p. 187). For H.D. a triadic relationship essentially represents, or stands in place of, all other relationships, instead figuring a three part relation that embodies them all. In this sense, H.D. suggests there is only one 'real love' and that love is the same bond that manifests between people *irrespective* of the specific relation. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. fulfils this tripartite structure in the bond between Thetis, Helen, and Achilles. As such, the text demonstrates a specifically Lacanian philosophy of love that resides in unsexed intersubjective and spiritual relations. For both H.D. and Lacan, love develops through mutual courage, shared knowledge, and aims at integral subject recognition.

Lacanian Love – “beyondsex”

*“when one loves, it has nothing to do with sex”
(Jacques Lacan)*

Recalling Lacan’s diagram for the sexual relation depicted in chapter one, the formula for fantasy love between the sexes outlined S (the split-subject), on the side of ‘man’, having a relation with the passive animation ‘ a ’ which is on the side of ‘woman’. Chapter one also outlined the possibility for ~~Woman~~, the ‘not whole’ woman, to have a relation with either Φ (the symbolic phallus), or $S(A)$ (the subject with a relation to the lacking symbolic order). The latter relation is important here as the precondition for intersubjective love. As demonstrated in chapter one, when ~~Woman~~ has a relation with $S(A)$ she gains the autonomous subjectivity necessary to escape the constraints of ‘being the phallus’ within the phallic function. Likewise, when a male subject has a relation with $S(A)$, he too is liberated from the traditional phallogocentric dependence on having the phallus restored to him in order to reaffirm his masculinity. This relation of the male subject to the lacking symbolic order is significant because it imbues him with the ability to deal with ~~Woman~~, rather than only the fantasy, ‘ a ’. In other words, since his masculinity is independent of the symbolic phallus, which he perceives as lacking, the need for a passive fantasy woman is negated; his masculinity stands alone rather than relying on a prop or sexual opposition to define and reconfirm it. Hence there is another formula not depicted on Lacan’s diagram for the sexual relation (because it is beyond sexual difference) $S(A)$ with a relation to $S(A)$, the only Lacanian formula in which two subjects can relate to one another outside of fantasy. This formula is precisely what is at stake in this chapter on love. Accordingly, Lacan states, “In love what is aimed at is the subject” (1998, p. 50), and in love, Lacan means the lacking subject. For a subject to be recognised by another subject there must be a point of connection, or moment of empathy, that occurs between two autonomous and lacking beings. Lacan also says, “love aims at being” (p. 39), and by this he means ‘being’ in a temporal sense, recognition of the other’s presence within a moment as such. Thus, there is an explicitly existential demand that love should answer in order that subjects experience confirmation of their being and this is the imperative of mutual recognition. When a subject believes that another subject perceives them, in spite of – or indeed because of – their lack, they feel a sense of wholeness, and subsequently, love.

The New Mortal

"One only really loves from a feminine position"
(Jacques-Alain Miller)

In Lacanian terms, mutual love requires that two speaking beings identify, at least to some degree, with the feminine subject position. This is not to say that love only exists between females, on the contrary, Lacan says "one is not obliged, when one is male, to situate oneself on the side of [man]. One can also situate oneself on the side of the not-whole. There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it." (Lacan, 1998, p. 76). In *Helen in Egypt*, the 'new Mortal' signifies Achilles' identification with the side of the not-whole. Just as Helen transcends her cultural identity and is reborn psychically in *Helen in Egypt*, so too is Achilles resurrected following his death on the Trojan battlefield. H.D. attributes the 'King of Myrmidons' a transcendental subjectivity that exceeds his place in Greek myth, and rewrites him as ambivalent to traditional phallic masculinity.

The fifth poem in "Pallinode" introduces Achilles as the 'new Mortal' emerging from his cultural skin in images that pre-empt Helen's chrysalis and rebirth later in the epic:

the body honoured
by the Grecian/host
was but an iron casement,

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

...
as the new Mortal,
shedding his glory,
limped slowly across the sand. (pp. 9-10)

This severance of Achilles from his body is a crucial inversion of the way the body is represented in the symbolic order. By separating Achilles from his iron casement, his symbolic body, he is repositioned in relation to the 'phallus as master signifier', which no longer dictates the terms of his existence. In other words, Achilles' death is only effectuated in the symbolic, a death of his phallic subjectivity; it is a metamorphosis akin to Helen's experience of rebirth in "Leukè", and as such liberates his psyche.

As Achilles' relation to the 'phallus as master signifier' shifts, the signifier 'man' points to a new signified; he becomes the 'new Mortal', still a man, but with a profound relation to the feminine. For Cixous, such a shift suggests a "liberation of sexuality" leading to a transformation of the way the body signifies difference, and as a result, "'femininity' and 'masculinity' would inscribe quite differently their effects of difference ... What appears to be 'feminine' or 'masculine' would no longer amount to the same thing" (2004, p. 351). This is crucial in terms of Achilles' ability to recognise Helen as a subject beyond fantasy; Achilles' changing perspective breaks down the binary opposition that requires women to remain a fantasy, and as such, he can relate to her as a figure beyond his own sexuality. Achilles' deep-rooted bond to Thetis further undermines his complete immersion in phallic masculinity; he retains an ambivalent relation to the phallus that stems from his childhood association with his divine sea-mother. Achilles carries this association with the feminine into maturation, incorporating it into his adult structure of masculine subjectivity, which, in turn, works continually to disrupt his relation with the phallus. As such, the Achilles in *Helen in Egypt* does not function in strictly phallocentric terms, but rather as an exemplar of the way men can perceive a tangible woman on the condition that they situate their masculinity as distinct from the phallic function. Subsequently, Friedman says, "As the leader of the warrior caste, he was the 'purely masculine' man ... Unlike the 'normal' man of Freud's theory, however, Achilles suffered from the inadequacy and lifelessness of the masculine iron-ring of war" (1987, p. 290). Furthermore, H.D.'s portrayal of Achilles mirrors Lacan's idea of a male identifying with the side of the not-whole; by identifying with the feminine, a man does not necessarily renounce his masculinity, instead he encompasses the psychical attributes of both the masculine and the feminine to adopt a not-whole subject position, which liberates him from the constraints of *phallic* masculinity. Accordingly, the 'new Mortal' provides a model of the male subject Cixous argues for in "Castration or Decapitation?" where she explains the solution is:

to unblock a sexuality that's just as much feminine as masculine, "de-phallocalise" the body, relieve man of his phallus, return him to an erogenous field and a libido that isn't stupidly organised round that monument, but appears shifting, diffused, taking on all the others of oneself. (1981, p. 51)

An important element of de-phallocalised masculinity is that it manifests without relying on strict opposition to passive femininity, instead tending towards a collapse of the polarity that traditionally governs sexual difference. Friedman also connects 'inadequacy and lifelessness' to masculinity constructed by the phallic function; this

makes sense in light of the severance of substance that is implicit to complete entry into the symbolic order, as is the case for subjects situating on the side of ‘man’ in Lacanian theory. Thus, the de-phallocalised body is manifestly demonstrative of the subject with a relation to the lacking symbolic and, as such, is precursive to intersubjective love.

Eidolon: Thetis – the Supreme Being

“the soul ... allows a being ... to bear what is intolerable in its world”
(Jacques Lacan)

Throughout *Helen in Egypt*, the love between Helen and Achilles implicates Thetis in multiple ways. She is implicitly responsible for Achilles’ ambivalence toward the phallus, and she explicitly governs their movements in both temporal and spatial terms. As the principal deity, she functions as a nucleus of the recognition that cements their love. This triad is consistent with Lacan’s belief that:

what represents the possibility of a bond of love between two of these beings, can also, manifesting the tension toward the Supreme Being, be reversed ... it is their courage in bearing the intolerable relationship to the Supreme Being that friends recognise and choose each other. This ethics is manifestly “beyondsex” ... (1998, p. 85)

For Lacan, empathy develops between two beings through their mutual response to the Supreme Being, and this empathy allows those beings to recognise in each other a commonality from which a bond will grow.

According to Greek mythology, Thetis’ involvement in the Achilles-Helen entanglement began while he was still in Troy and Aphrodite and Thetis contrived a meeting between them in a remote location (Grimal, 1996, p. 6; Graves, 1992, p. 664). Graves traces Thetis’ implication further. He recalls the prophesy, “any son born to Thetis would be greater than his father” (Graves, p. 59), which resulted in Zeus forcing Thetis to marry Peleus, a mortal. This, in turn, led to the inciting factor of Eris’ apple contest: “the decision had already been taken when Eris threw down a golden apple inscribed ‘For the Fairest’ at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis” (Graves, p. 631). Paris subsequently won Helen, his reward for deeming Aphrodite the most beautiful goddess, and the conditions were set for the Trojan War and Zeus sending Helen to Egypt. According to Graves,

Achilles was raised by 'Cheiron the Centaur' to become the 'King of Myrmidons' (p. 642-657); however Thetis maintained her close bond with Achilles providing him with guidance throughout both his childhood and the war. Most significantly, Thetis intervened in Achilles' call to Troy, where "he was fated either to gain glory there and die early, or to live a long but inglorious life at home. She disguised him as a girl, and entrusted him to Lycomedes, King of Scyros" (Graves, p. 642). While the attempt to divert him failed, Thetis continued to guide Achilles throughout the war and remained a strong presence until his death, when she "snatched Achilles' soul from the pyre and conveyed it to Leuce" where, Graves says, he married Helen (p. 679).

In *Helen in Egypt*, the thread of Thetis' influence begins during the first meeting between Helen and Achilles, when Helen invokes the name of the sea-goddess to restore Achilles' sea-enchanted perception, as he attacks what he imagines is the phantom. At this stage, he is still acting in accordance with his hero identity and the naming of Thetis catalyses the restoration of his childhood relation to the feminine. The prose reflection to the eighth poem of Book Four in "Eidolon" recalls this earlier incident to consolidate the overarching significance of Thetis' governance: "*Indeed, the enchantment, the magic, at the time and equally in retrospect, is over-powering. It could not have been endured but 'for her'. It was to Thetis that Helen prayed, on her first encounter with Achilles.*" (p. 269). To return to that initial call to Thetis so late in the epic is significant, it highlights the intensity of Helen and Achilles' first meeting, and more pertinently, the memory immediately includes Thetis' presence as a prominent focal point. This suggests that Helen implicated Thetis into her relation with Achilles from its commencement and that Thetis figures permanently as the facilitator of their union. Thetis continues to oversee the relation throughout the epic, providing a voice that directs Helen to leave Egypt and releases her from the past. She says: "Helen, the sails are set. / Strive not to wake the dead; / ... Helen and Achilles / are not dead, not lost; / ... dare the uncharted seas, / Achilles waits, and life;" (pp. 106-107). The message to Helen is sound advice that echoes the Freudian model for mourning; Thetis is encouraging Helen to move forward, to relinquish her solitude in Egypt, and courageously start a new life with Achilles on Leukè.

Thetis' status as a primary deity comparable to God as a Supreme Being is explicated in biblical allusions in Book Five of "Eidolon". Helen asks, "was it Thetis who herded the

flock, / the two and the two, begotten / of light and of dark?" (pp. 273-274). These lines point directly to Noah as the one chosen to select those who would prevail and continue life after God cleansed the earth with a flood. The poem presents an important inversion, however, as the sea is under the command of Thetis herself. The task that previously required collaboration between several patriarchs is now the domain of the one deity. Thetis' supreme divinity is crystallised as she takes on the power of a signifier that, like the Hebrew name for God 'YHWH', is unpronounceable⁷:

How did she know the word,
the one-word that would turn and bind
and blind him to any other?

he could name Helena
but the other he could not name
she spoke of the goddess Isis,

and he answered "Isis,"
but how did she know that her Thetis

...

would brand on his forehead
that name, that the name

and the flame and the fire
would weld him to her
who spoke it, who thought it,

who stared through the fire,
who stood as if to withstand
the onslaught of fury and battle,

who stood unwavering but made
as if to dive down, unbroken,
undefeated in the tempest roar

and thunder, inviting mountains
of snow-clad foam-tipped
green walls of sea-water

to rise like ramparts about her,
walls to protect yet walls to dive under,
dive through and dive over;

how dared she speak that name

...

⁷ Here, I quote at length to emphasise the way H.D. develops the dominant image of Thetis as both a powerful body of 'sea-water', and as a powerful goddess. The extensive inclusion is also used to convey the way H.D. crafted the combination to wrap back around on itself, starting with the allusion to the masculine deity, then shifting to Thetis's attributes as the sea-goddess, and finally to render her beyond traditional signification.

but there is one secret,
unpronounceable name,
a whisper, a breath,

two syllables, yes, like the Isis-name,
but broken, not quite the same,
breathed differently (pp. 277-279)

The images in this poem transform the old biblical flood into a phenomenon of H.D.'s view of Sapphic femininity (Gregory, 2002, pp. 42-46). Thetis is herself the sea, the greatest power imaginable as a body that shields, obstructs, yields, withstands, thunders, and breathes. The poem additionally confirms the triadic love of Thetis, Helen, and Achilles. With Thetis' previously established implication in Achilles' subjectivity, Helen's invocation of the sea-mother melds the attributes of both women and, subsequently, Achilles' devotion to Thetis transfers to Helen. This transference is important as it facilitates Achilles' extension of his association with the feminine, Thetis, to implicate Helen into the truth of his 'being'. Consequently, Thetis' construction as a 'Supreme Being' doubles the significance DuPlessis says unites Helen and Achilles. For DuPlessis, Thetis is a "unifying mother" (1990, p. 417) whom Helen and Achilles are on individual quests to locate, and incidentally discover each other in the process. However, in light of Lacan's understanding of the role of the Supreme Being, Thetis' implication exceeds the singular role of a 'unifying mother'. She is no longer an external element since she comes to work *through* Achilles and Helen, pulsing within and between them, to render the authentic love that emerges from their mutual courage in identifying with her as both deity and guardian.

Recognition: The Subject-to-Subject Relation

It was a treasure beyond a treasure

...

Achilles had loved her;

(Helen in Egypt, p. 282)

Having discussed Achilles' and Helen's individual pathways that lead them to perceive the lack in the symbolic, and establishing their relationship with Thetis as the grounds for mutual courage and shared knowledge of the 'Supreme Being', what remains is the final revelation of the way love manifests through a subject-to-subject relation. Lacan explains:

All love is based on a certain relationship between two unconscious knowledges. ...Regarding one's partner, love can only actualize what, in a sort of poetic flight, ... I called courage. ... But is it courage that is at stake or pathways of recognition? That recognition is nothing other than the way in which the relationship said to be sexual – that has now become a subject-to-subject relationship, the subject being but the effect of unconscious knowledge – stops not being written. (1998, p. 144)

Ambiguous to the end, this passage is Lacan's final position on love. Essentially, he is saying that while his previous discussions had made the connection between mutual courage and love, courage actually functions more as a precondition, or scaffold, that supports a love that for Lacan is ultimately figured as intersubjective recognition. When two subjects share similar innate understandings (as products of unconscious knowledge) they are more able to recognise a familiarity in the other that reinforces the way they conceive of themselves. In other words, there is a basic affinity produced by recognition that confirms the unique existence of both the self and the other simultaneously. Lacan also said that, following intersubjective recognition, the relation between two subjects could now stop 'not being written'. To stop 'not being written' simply means that it, and by 'it' I mean love beyond fantasy, has reached a point in theoretical analysis whereby it can finally be articulated. Lacan found a way to enter love into a discursive space that could not previously accommodate it.

In the fourth poem of *Helen in Egypt* Helen recalls her first moment of recognition with Achilles:

How did we know each other?
was it the sea enchantment in his eyes
of Thetis, his sea-mother?

what was the token given?
I was alone, bereft,
and wore no zone, no crown,

and he was shipwrecked,
drifting without chart,
famished and tempest-driven (p. 7)

Stripped of the glamour of myth and cultural identities, the moment of Helen and Achilles' first meeting is untainted by fantasy and, as such, mutual recognition is possible. Following the fall of Troy, Achilles severs his association with the phallic iron-

ring and reinstates his pre-war identity structure, a feminised selfhood that binds him to Thetis. For DuPlessis: "Making Achilles and Helen into fellow questers is the first move in H.D.'s strategy for breaking the script of romantic thralldom. The lover and woman are imagined as brother-sister questers, so that totally spiritual, not sexual, forces define the relationship." (1990, p. 419). Whilst this simplified view of Achilles and Helen functioning in a sibling relationship fails to take account of the child "*Euphorion*" that results from their union (*Helen in Egypt*, p. 109), it does highlight the divergence they represent from traditional coupledness by focussing on the spiritual element of their connection, rather than the sexual. The implications of this divergence are twofold. Firstly, situating the bond between Achilles and Helen outside of the sexual relation is important from a Lacanian perspective as it signals the possibility of a subject-to-subject relationship. Secondly, the depiction of a love that diverges from coupledness destabilises the "hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition" (Cixous, 1981, p. 44). Cixous also asks the pertinent question of "what a completely different couple relationship would be like, what a love that was more than merely a cover for, a veil of, war would be like" (p. 44). The war that Cixous is concerned with is one waged within the traditional couple itself; it is a war in which phallic masculinity *acts* its power over passive femininity. This war, according to Cixous, "is founded in the *couple*. A couple posed in opposition, in tension, in conflict . . . a couple engaged in a kind of war in which death is always at work" (p. 44). The couple that concerns Cixous is the one that manifests through the sexual relation whereby difference must prevail in service of the phallic function. *Helen in Egypt* answers Cixous' call for "a complete transformation in the relation of one to the other" (p. 44). The unsexed intersubjective love portrayed between Achilles and Helen shows how a subject can recognise their lack, and the lack in their other, and love them for it.

After Paris' arrow pierces Achilles' heel, Helen intercepts the work of Eros and in doing so, undoes his attempt to instigate false love:

still I feel the tightening muscles,
the taut sinews quiver,

as if I, Helena, had withdrawn
from the bruised and swollen flesh,
the arrow from its wound (p. 8)

The imagery of these lines draws acute attention to Achilles' injured body in explicitly sexual terms; the first two lines invoke the post-orgasmic body, which works in tension with the insinuation of rape in the last three lines. This tension is important as the arrow takes on a violent hyper-phallic masculinity as it actively assaults a feminised victim, Achilles, thus signalling the metaphoric meaning: Helen does not want Achilles' psyche wounded, denied honour and integrity, by the force of Eros, whose arrow would simultaneously massacre the possibility of real love for them both. Importantly, Helen says she *feels* the physical effect of Achilles' wound, suggesting the implications of the arrow extend to her own being by empathic reverberation, which is evidence of her subjective unconscious knowledge. This same bond re-emerges in the third poem of Book Four in "Eidolon", when Helen reflects:

it was only, when I felt
with him, lying there,
the bitterness of his loss,

that I knew he loved, that I knew
the ecstasy of desire had smitten him,
burnt him; touched him with the Phoenix-fire,

the invincible armour
melted him quite away,
till he knew his mother; (pp. 260-261)

This poem reveals the shift in Helen's knowledge that occurred after her own rebirth. She recognises Achilles' experience because she can relate it to her own memory of the pain she endured in renouncing desire, but she also remembers the liberation of the Phoenix-fire of rebirth. In this sense, Helen implicates Achilles' loss into her love for him because it affirms her new subjectivity. In the above passage H.D. also succinctly echoes the Lacanian view explained by Jacques-Alain Miller, "To really love someone is to believe that by loving them you'll get to a truth about yourself. We love the one that harbours the response, or a response, to our question: 'Who am I?'" (n.d.). However, this question to the beloved is complex, because the response of love is that 'I' cannot be signified; what is important is the lover's recognition that there is no simple, final, response to the question. Miller further indicates that men love the one who they can recognise as familial and associate with a maternal figure, the one who castrates them, which suggests Achilles' recognition of Helen's semblance of Thetis is a marker for the presence of love. An important distinction therefore arises between men desiring the (fantasy) woman, and men loving the (real) woman. Whereas *objet petit a* restores the phallus, loving the feminine subject cements the man's lack: it feminises the masculine subject.

Consequently, men *love* the woman who knows they, the man, lack the phallus. This love depends on the man remaining castrated, and on the man's lover loving them anyway. Likewise, women love the one who sees them as a subject, as opposed to the fantasy *objet petit a*. Furthermore, Miller clarifies, love is "reciprocal because there's a to and fro: the love I have for you is the return effect of the cause of love you are for me. So, you're implicated". Thus, Helen's inversion of Eros' attempt to penetrate Achilles with his arrow is essential to her own preservation: had the attempt succeeded, Achilles would not have seen through Eros' illusion and perceived the real Helen, which in turn created the conditions for reciprocity of Helen's love.

H.D.'s portrait of love in *Helen in Egypt* implies an ethics that immediately unravels the possessive element of fantasy. This love, in Lacan and H.D.'s philosophy, means the subject knows that there is always an excess of their other that resides beyond the symbolic, which cannot be contained or signified; they love the other *because* of their lack, because they are not-whole. Knowledge and empathy can bring two lacking subjects closer and help them choose one another, but it is only by accepting there is something about the loved one that remains *unknowable*, that the love can manifest ethically; this love wants the other to persist without limit. Where idealised erotic love demands the death of the other, real love's only imperative is life.

Conclusion

"in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine"

(Jane Eyre, p. 529)

There is a final impasse within the female body that seals the philosophical correlation between H.D.'s and Lacan's exploration of the relation between love and sexual difference. Whilst it is true that two unsexed subjects are able to relate on a spiritual and empathetic basis, and recognise in each other their existential truths, there remains a contradiction in the biological drive of the maternal body to reproduce that undermines any final stability of unsexed love. In this sense, the love proposed by Lacan and H.D. only pertains to transitory contexts, moments, or relationships than can withstand a lifetime without consummation. H.D. addresses this impasse for Helen in *Winter Love* (1972b), the coda to *Helen in Egypt*. The poem relates Helen's return to Sparta after loving Achilles on Leukè and highlights the collapse of their love subsequent to the birth of the child Euphrion:

cruel, cruel, the thought of Love,
while Helen's breasts swell, painful
with the ambrosial sap, *Amrita*

that must be given;
I die in agony whether I give or do not give;
cruel, cruel *Sage-Femme*.

wiser than all the regents of God's throne,
why do you torture me?
come, come, O *Espérance*,

Espérance, O golden bee,
take life afresh and if you must,
so slay me.

(WL, p. 117)

These final stanzas of *Winter Love* show Helen's return to her biological body, but with the encumbrance of insights gained in *Helen in Egypt*, renewed desire unravels her peace, and the child Euphrion/*Espérance* reinstates her to a sexual identity; the cause of death. Lacan agrees that there is an inherent paradox of life and death in reproduction; in order to create life, woman is always posited back into a relation with the Phallus, which negates her existence and is therefore her death (1998, pp. 120-121). This paradox, which

arises by reading both works successively, concerned H.D. to the extent that she separated the coda prior to publication. According to Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D. had intended to publish both works together; however, “just before the manuscript finally went in, she changed her mind. Its appearance in the same book would, she felt, destroy the poem she had originally conceived” (H.D., 1972a, p. viii). H.D.’s change of heart makes sense in light of the shift in tone that occurs between the two works; *Helen in Egypt* has an enigmatic presence, and conveys a subtle feeling of tender hope and love that *Winter Love* undoes in its return to desire with a slightly more cynical voice. Pearson explains this shift as representative of H.D. rendering the coda as “a poem ‘in contemporary time,’ her own older age” (p. viii). Glaser expands this insight to consider *Helen in Egypt*’s way of “giving the timeless voice of Helen a place in the process of retrospective interpretation” (2005, p. 103). In essence, H.D.’s maturity speaks through the reflective prose sections that preface each poem: a distinct yet intimately knowing voice that hovers on the edge of the poetic tension, and whose tone pre-empts the voice of *Winter Love*, which conveys H.D.’s experiences of Eros as bittersweet, as well as her realistic accession to the overwhelming and destructive power of erotic love.

In *Winter Love*, H.D.’s philosophy on love ultimately mirrors Lacan’s ambivalence and ambiguity. They are both ambivalent in their alternating position on love’s existence and indeed its desirability, and they both remain ambiguous in the end as to a final statement. They explore love, they explain and demonstrate it manifestly, yet both seem to conclude an inevitability of its limited temporality and agree on absolute discordance between love and the phallogentric heterosexual relationship. “Like Helen’s search”, Friedman concludes, “H.D.’s epic form does not have a definitive end”; rather, it imparts a “constant reminder of ‘the constancy of search’ and the reflective process that ‘unravels the tangled skeins’ of truth” (1981, p. 67). Taken together, as was H.D.’s original intention, *Helen in Egypt* and *Winter Love* expose rather than resolve the impasse of love. However, what is clear is that H.D.’s Helen has evolved to a position where she has choice. She is no longer caught in Eros’ web of artifice; she understands the difference between love based on fantasy and love beyond the sexual relation. Furthermore, by looking to *Hermetic Definition* (1972a), H.D.’s final poetic work that she completed just months prior to her death, a suggestion persists that she did finally decide on the possibility of real love. Throughout this poem, H.D. marries repetitions of “the reddest rose unfolds” to its counterpart, “you are my whole estate”, from which emerges a form of closing statement of her belief in a way to love that lasts.

H.D.'s revision of Helen remains a unique instance of a woman writer re-writing a historically sexualised woman's subjectivity. Such undertakings are vital, Cixous says, because "writing is precisely *the very process of change* ... the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (1976, p. 879). Despite this advice, current writers continue to reproduce Helen in sexualised terms that repeat Euripides' early denigration of her. McCullough's *The Song of Troy* (1998) and Atwood's *The Penelopiad: the myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (2005) both emphasise Helen's sexuality, vanity, and opportunistic exploits. Atwood repeats this to a lesser degree in her poem "Helen of Troy does countertop dancing" (1995).

Whilst the correlation between Lacan and H.D.'s philosophy of love emerged from articulations that occurred late in their lives, and as such remained, for them, undeveloped, I fervently believe that it is through recognising their shared philosophy that new understandings of the sexual relation will grow. They have provided a crucial springboard from which further investigation may finally lead to discovering a way for intersubjective relationships to thrive *because* of a love that seeks not death, but life. I believe it is within her poetics of a not-whole masculinity that H.D. articulated a non-violent way to undo the hierarchy of phallogentric sexual difference. This area of H.D.'s feminism remains unexplored, but as demonstrated by the Lacanian model of love, the exemplification of the not-whole man works *productively* in a way that evades approaches that focus exclusively on the feminine. H.D.'s angle is unique: rather than simply invert the patriarchal hierarchy to re-imagine, and privilege, women, her philosophy seeks to bring the sexes together through their mutual renunciation of the power of the phallus to determine their subjectivity. Recognising this difference is important, Cixous contends, because "It will be up to man and woman to render obsolete the former relationship and all its consequences, to consider the launching of a brand new subject, alive" (1976, p. 890). This call for a new subject is specifically answered by H.D.'s 'new Mortal', the not-whole masculine subject that can relate to the not-whole feminine subject.

Portrayals of H.D.'s vision of de-phallogentric men are rare in literature, but they do exist. Gothic literature, for example, flourishes with visions of not-whole masculine characters. Within this genre, their lack is frequently made literal as they emerge

physically or psychically disfigured, yet despite their scars, they retain an exquisitely erotic appeal to their beloved. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is a prime example of the raw sensuality that a perceived lack imbues to masculinity. In the text, Jane tells Rochester:

'I am my own mistress'

'And you will stay with me?'

'Certainly – unless you object. ... I find you lonely: I will be your companion – to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.'

'My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied: or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.' (Brontë, 1848/2007, pp. 524-525)

Rochester declares his disfigurements "a ghastly sight!", but Jane assures him that even with "the scar of fire on your forehead...one is in danger of loving you too well" (p. 525). Her love grows by equal measure to his lack. Rochester's prior identification with the phallus leaves him sceptical, it persists despite his new subjectivity, and again he asks:

'And to bear with my infirmities, Jane: to overlook my deficiencies.'

'Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now...than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector.' (Brontë, p. 536)

Having discarded his phallic masculinity, Rochester is infinitely more real, and more sensual, than in his former sexual identity. Again, the intense bond of love is present in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Both Rochester and Heathcliff cement their beloved's affection by embracing their excess, claiming their lack, and in turn have their love reciprocated and concretised with intensely intimate and unbreakable bonds. The Lacanian model of real love also lends itself to the intimacy of unsexed relationships that proliferate in Modernist literature. Mirroring H.D.'s existential concerns, writers such as Samuel Beckett and Anton Chekhov produced works that explore relationships centred on a shared experience of bearing what is intolerable in life.

Within these echoes of Lacanian love that reverberate in gothic and modernist literature – sites that foreground uncertain social contexts and welcome transgression – is the confirmation of the possibility H.D. and Lacan so tentatively suggest. At times when

society's ideals become unstuck or questionable, the veil simultaneously loses opacity, the phallic symbolic order is revealed as lacking, and real love grows. Love *can* exist, if we fracture the symbolic, renounce fantasy, and, if in the resulting void we move through what was unbearable to awaken and resurrect the soul, gravitating toward another, two *can* remain two, alive in love.

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