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The bee has played a significant role in human cultures and religions since before the time of the ancient Egyptians and, as a result, has become a well-known symbol in world mythologies and literature. In this thesis, I explore the ways in which H.D. participates in this literary tradition by drawing on these ancient associations when she employs the bee symbol in her poetry and prose. Using two of her novels, *HERmione* and *The Gift*, as interpretive keys for understanding her use of the bee symbol in two of her most important works of poetry, *Sea Garden* and *Trilogy*, I trace H.D.'s use of the bee through the course of her career and argue that she employed it as a symbol for herself as a poet and as a reflection of her ongoing creative investments.

THE GIFT OF THE BEE-POET:  
BEE SYMBOLISM IN  
H.D.'S POETRY  
AND PROSE

by

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

**Introduction**

Hilda Doolittle began her career as a poet when Ezra Pound sent her poems to Harriet Monroe for publication in a 1913 issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. At the bottom of one of these poems he signed her name, “H.D., Imagiste.” Initially inspired by the ideas presented by T.E. Hulme at the Poets’ Club in London, Pound was responsible for putting forth the specific tenets of Imagism; nevertheless, it was H.D.’s early poems that gave Pound an ideal model on which to base his criteria. In his essay, “A Few Don’ts from an Imagist,” Pound proposed guidelines for imagists emphasizing that they must avoid abstract and decadent language and should aim to achieve objectivity in writing through the use of precise visual images. The image, he explained, represents “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” Although as a movement Imagism was fading away by 1917, H.D.’s writing continued to reflect a tendency towards this objective and impersonal style. In her later poetry, this impersonality worked through symbols which were shaped by her relationship with Sigmund Freud as one of his analysands. As a patient and student of psychoanalysis, H.D. was interested in exploring the meaning behind dream symbols which she referred to as “hieroglyphs of the unconscious” (*Tribute to Freud* 93). H.D.’s investment in both Modernist poetics and

in psychoanalysis reveals that she understood the depth of the symbol's multivalent nature and its capacity to evoke and to interrelate intense human emotion and experiences. Thus, when a particular image appears repeatedly in her work over the span of her career, it is imperative that scholars pause to recognize and explore that image in order to gain a deeper sense of her creative investments. The bee is an image that deserves such attention, for it is one that wielded incredible symbolic power in nearly all of H.D.'s poetry and prose.

In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. writes, "There are all these shapes, lines, graphs, and the *hieroglyph of the unconscious*, and the Professor [Freud] . . . deplored the tendency to *fix* ideas too firmly to set symbols, or to weld them inexorably" (93). The symbol of the bee can be approached as one such hieroglyph of H.D.'s unconscious or "writing on the wall" of her mind; it is a key to her imaginative beginnings and a symbol that illuminates the progression of her poetic vision. However, in accordance with Freud's (and implicitly H.D.'s) assertion not to fix meanings "too firmly" to a particular symbol, in my analysis, I will not attempt to "read" the bee in a formulaic manner, but will rather track H.D.'s use of this symbol in various works of poetry and prose in order to observe how her application changes, although with consistency, over time. Drawing on its classical associations with poets and prophets, and as a symbol of eloquence, re-birth, and healing, H.D. uses the bee to represent the sacred role of the poet as a possessor of ancient knowledge to distill language to its purest level of universal form. I argue, that is, that like the bee that extracts nectar from flowers and returns to the hive to make honey, the

poet refines language and gleans from it the essence of beauty and knowledge which she uses to find meaning and to facilitate healing in the remnants of the war-ravaged wasteland she inhabits. Ultimately, through a deeper understanding of H.D.'s use of the bee symbol and her self-identification with it, I will illustrate how she hoped to help mend the chasm of collective consciousness through her poetry and to justify the necessity of poets in an age of war.

### **Bees in Literature: A Brief History**

still the Luxor bee, chick and hare  
pursue unalterable purpose

they continue to prophesy  
from the stone papyrus

-H.D., *Trilogy*

Before addressing the image in H.D.'s work specifically, I shall first present a brief history of the bee in the literary tradition in order to establish and elucidate long-held connotations of this ancient, and often sacred, symbol.<sup>1</sup> I will focus on three conventional uses of the bee in literature: the bee's association with divinity; the

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<sup>1</sup> Implicit in this methodology is the assumption that H.D. would have likely been familiar with many of these sources owing to both her education and her interest in ancient cultures and mythologies. Throughout this paper, I will demonstrate this assertion with clear evidence from either H.D.'s work or her biography; my concern here, however, is simply to present well-established scholarship on the bee—much of which was done in H.D.'s lifetime—as an important symbol in literature.



metaphor of the beehive as a human community; and the bee as a symbol for poets and prophets.<sup>2</sup>

In 1937, Hilda Ransome published her still-influential book, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore*, a comprehensive study of the history of the bee. She asserts that within human cultures, the bee has virtually always played a vital role:

From the dawn of human society the nature and origin of the bee have awakened the curiosity and interest of man. For thousands of years honey was the only sweetening material known, and it is quite natural that in ancient times the little busy creature who produced this sweet food should have been regarded with reverence and awe. (19)

In fact, the Araña Cave in Spain features one of the oldest known examples of art in which a man climbing a cliff to retrieve honey is depicted on the cave wall. This innate curiosity for the bee and the demand for its sweet, medicinal honey inspired even the earliest of human civilizations to include it in their most sacred texts. Ransome notes that references to bees and honey have been found in the ancient Sumerian and Babylonian cuneiform writings, the Hittite code, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and the Rig-Veda (24). In Egyptian and Greek mythology, moreover, the bee was associated with Ra and Zeus, respectively, who are both considered to be fathers of the gods. The Salt Magical Papyrus, which contains the Egyptian creation myth, includes a passage in which the tears of Ra turn into bees. The bees, in turn, help to create and sustain new life by pollinating the flowers and trees. In Greek mythology, Rhea, in order to spare her infant

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<sup>2</sup> I will save a more detailed discussion of the bee in Greek and Egyptian mythologies specifically until later in the paper when I demonstrate how H.D. draws from those sources directly in *Trilogy*.

son from being eaten by Kronos, hid Zeus away in a Cretan cave. He was nourished by bee-maidens, or *melissae*, who fed him a diet of honey. Honey remained the favorite food of the gods according to Greek myth.

During the spread of Christianity throughout central Europe, the bee continued to retain its sacred status. As beekeeping became increasingly popular, bees were lauded as symbols for model Christians because they exemplified industrious and moral behavior (Ransome 144). The Bible, moreover, contains numerous references to both the bee and its byproduct. For example, in the Old Testament, the Promised Land is known as the “land flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>3</sup> Hattie Ellis notes that up until the seventh century, Christians who were newly baptized would consume these substances following the ceremony (89). Additionally, Luke 24:42 records that Jesus is given broiled fish and a honeycomb to eat following the resurrection. Ransome explains that in early Christian churches, the beeswax used for candles was symbolic of the virgin body of Christ since it was commonly believed that the bees only took wax from the purest and sweetest of flowers (148). Similar to the Egyptian creation myth, in traditional Christian lore, it was believed that bees actually originated from either Christ’s wounds, his navel, or from the tears or blood he shed while on the cross (Wilson 70). This is a belief with which H.D. was certainly familiar owing to her upbringing in the Moravian church.<sup>4</sup>

Christians were not the first humans to ascribe human characteristics and attributes to bees. In 350 BCE, Aristotle wrote his *Historia Animalium* which included

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<sup>3</sup> Deut. 31:20, Exodus 33:3

<sup>4</sup> I will discuss the symbol of the bee in the Moravian faith at length in the following chapter.

the first written biological observation of bees. He comments on the highly organized honeybee community and describes the activity of the hive in anthropomorphic terms. Following Aristotle's model, myriad authors have written about the beehive in this way. Virgil, for example, is especially remembered for his epic poem, *The Georgics*, which Ransome refers to as the "Epic of the Bees" (84). In Book IV, Virgil describes the life and habits of bees, asserting that they are a model for men to follow because they are great laborers that selflessly sacrifice their lives for the good of their community:

Often too, wandering among jagged flint they scrape  
Their wings, and freely give their lives under their load:  
So great their love of flowers and the glory of honey-making  
Thus although the limit of a slender age awaits each one  
(for never more than seven summers it's unskined)  
Yet the race endures immortal, through unnumbered years stands fast  
The fortune of the house, and their pedigree records ancestors of ancestors. (133)

In Book I of the *Aeneid*, Virgil makes a similar comparison between humans and bees, praising the bees because they each know their designated task which they willingly and joyfully perform. Shakespeare too drew on this tradition in *Henry V* when the Archbishop of Canterbury describes honeybees as if they were an organized city of people (I.ii.187-196).

While the beehive was regarded as a microcosm of human society since ancient times, bees themselves were traditionally associated with poets and prophets, and honey was believed to be the source of divine inspiration. In *Ion*, Plato describes the poet as a "light and winged and holy thing" and compares the soul of the poet to a bee. He writes

that poets “bring their lyric poetry to us from certain gardens and glades of the Muses, by gathering it from the honey-springs, like bees, and flying through the air like they do” (55). Plato also insists that a poet “cannot compose before he gets inspiration and loses control of his senses and his reason deserted him . . . The reason is that they utter these words of theirs not by virtue of a skill, but by a divine power” (55). That is, before one can write poetry or utter oracles, a poet or prophet must be in a divinely-issued, altered state of mind. This was certainly the case for the Pythian priestess at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi; in his fourth Pythian Ode, Pindar refers to the priestess as the “Delphic Bee” (56). According to the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, there were other priestesses at Delphi known as the Thriae who were associated with bees because of the humming sound they made while prophesying, and since they could only give true predictions after they consumed, and became intoxicated by, honey. These bee-maidens were responsible for giving Hermes the gift of prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

Eva Crane, a prominent contemporary scholar on the biological and cultural history of bees, notes that “it was often believed that a wise philosopher, eloquent speaker or inspired writer owed his outstanding ability to the fact that bees had alighted on his mouth at infancy” (603). Individuals believed to have been gifted by the bees in this way include Plato, Sophocles, Virgil, Lucan, St. Ambrose and St. Basil (Crane 603; Ransome 105). Moreover, Scheinberg explains,

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<sup>5</sup> Hermes is an extremely important figure for H.D. Friedman notes that the god was H.D.’s “patron” (207).

Poetry and prophecy, traditionally viewed as springing in common from divine inspiration, were at first not clearly distinguished from one another even by their content. Poetry could foretell the future, while oracles often provided men with information about the forgotten past. (22)

This association with the bee would resonate especially with H.D. since she believed herself as a poet to have access to knowledge of the past, present, and future. And because H.D. uses the symbol of the bee as a representation of herself, she thus presents herself as a poet-prophet who is privy to forgotten knowledge and who is responsible for sharing it with others in order to bring about healing.

H.D. likely was also exposed to more contemporary uses of the bee in literature, positioning her as both an inheritor of and a contributor to this tradition. In 1869, for example, Leo Tolstoy, himself a beekeeper, wrote in *War and Peace*, “Human comprehension does not extend beyond observation of the interaction between the living bee and other manifestations of life” (1270). According to *The Gift*, H.D.’s father owned this book and H.D. attempted to read it as a young girl (109). Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Life of the Bee* (1901), which I shall argue was an especially influential work for H.D., was greatly inspired by ancient writings about bees. Elsewhere in the literary tradition, one might recall the “murmuring” of Tennyson’s “innumerable bees” in “Come Down, O Maiden” and, similarly, the “bee-loud glade” of Yeats’ “Lake Isle of Innisfree.” Emily Dickinson, whom H.D. spent some time reading early in her career, also used the bee extensively in her poetry. Finally, a notable contemporary and friend of H.D., Edith

Sitwell, employed the image of the bee in her poetry on more than one occasion, including in one poem entitled “The Bee-Keeper.”

### H.D.’s Bees

Though we wander about,  
find no honey of flowers in this waste,  
is our task the less sweet—  
who recall the old splendour,  
await the new beauty of cities?

-H.D., *Sea Garden*

H.D.’s earliest poems provide evidence for what would become her lifelong enchantment with bees for their symbolic associations in both literary and mythological contexts. One of her three poems first published in *Poetry* in 1913, “Priapus,” not only features a “honey-seeking” swarm but is named for the god who is the guardian of bees in Greek mythology. H.D.’s first full collection of poetry, *Sea Garden* (1916), includes images of bees and honey throughout—most notably, of course, in “Orchard” (formerly titled “Priapus”) and “Cities.” In *Hymen* (1921), the bee appears in the poem “Hymen” and in “Fragment 113,” in which H.D. uses Sappho’s aphorism “neither honey nor bee for me” as an epigraph.<sup>6</sup> In “The Mysteries” from *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931), the speaker mentions the “Delphic pest” which implies that H.D. knew that the Pythian priestess at Apollo’s temple was also known as the “Delphic Bee.” The Pythian priestess

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<sup>6</sup> Edith Sitwell used this same fragment in her poem “A Love Song” in the line “But now there is neither honey nor bee for me - neither the sting nor the sweetness” (345).

also features in *Trilogy* (1946) as does the symbol of the bee itself in the form of a hieroglyph (the “Luxor bee”) in the first lines of *The Walls Do Not Fall*. One will recall the image of the “massive bees” shaking pollen from the bell tower of Venice as well as the speaker’s incredible yet enigmatic assertion that “resurrection is a bee-line” in *The Flowering of the Rod*. The same “Luxor bee” reappears in *Helen in Egypt* (1961) as a “writing on the wall” that Helen attempts to “read.” Finally, in *Hermetic Definition* (1960), H.D. makes extensive use of the bee which is conflated with Helen’s child, Espérance, in the final lines of “Winter’s Love.”<sup>7</sup>

While bees are also a common image in much of H.D.’s prose, in this paper, I shall rely on the function of the bee in two of her novels as a key for interpreting her use of that image in her poetry. I focus on *The Gift* and *HERmione*, two ostensibly autobiographical novels, to argue that the bee was a significant symbol in H.D.’s imaginative adolescence and was crucial for developing her early poetics. Specifically, I use these novels to analyze the symbol of the bee in two of H.D.’s most important collections of poetry, *Sea Garden* and *Trilogy*. In both of these collections, the poet emphasizes the importance of remembering aspects of the ancient world which must be transcribed by the poet and brought back to the modern world. However, while *Sea Garden* is concerned with re-creating the aesthetic ideals of the distant past through her innovative poetry, *Trilogy* centers on the power of poetry to heal the collective war-

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<sup>7</sup> The purpose for citing each of these instances is not to present an exhaustive list with compendium-like thoroughness, but rather to demonstrate the prevalence of this image in all of H.D.’s poetry.

fractured consciousness. In both volumes, the symbol of the bee-poet is crucial in helping H.D. to imagine how to achieve these ends.



## CHAPTER II

### *THE GIFT AND THE BEE: H.D.'S MORAVIAN HERITAGE*

Written between 1941 and 1943, *The Gift* is one result of H.D.'s work with Freud during the previous decade. As an exploration of H.D.'s memory, the narrative is told from H.D.'s perspective as a ten-year-old child, although she maintains the awareness of her psychoanalytically-informed adult self. Through writing the novel, H.D. uncovers the memory of a traumatic event involving a serious injury her father suffers in an accident with a street-car, a painful memory which overshadows and suppresses a more positive one of her grandmother and the psychic transference of the visionary "gift" from one generation of women to the next. The narrative of H.D.'s childhood is framed by an air raid in London which also provides the connection between her present experiences as an adult and a parallel historical circumstance involving a conflict between her distant Moravian relatives and a tribe of Native Americans—the event that she intuits during the transference of the "gift" which she describes through the metaphor of a beehive.

I argue that H.D. employs the image of the bee at the moment that she finally receives the gift from her grandmother because of its associations with her Moravian (and maternal) heritage, and because of its well-established connection to poets and prophets in the literary tradition. The symbol, therefore, links H.D. to her own personal history and asserts her connection, as a poet, to a larger human memory, reflecting the bee's

ancient association with eloquence and vision. Each of these meanings is collapsed in one of the final images of the novel, in which a choir of Moravian men is likened to the humming sound of a swarm of bees, symbolizing an act of healing and reunion between warring factions.

In terms of H.D.'s biography and the scope of this thesis, I begin simultaneously at the beginning and at the end. That is, although *The Gift* is primarily about H.D.'s childhood, it is written from the point of view of an artistically mature, albeit psychologically fragile, poet who is working through traumatic memories in order to cope with the terrifying events of WWII. My analysis explores the connections between H.D.'s memory and her poetry by reading backwards in time through the lens of *The Gift* in order to then look forward to the start of her career as a young poet in the following chapter. Ultimately, my aim is to establish that H.D.'s exposure to the image of the bee in childhood eventually influenced her use of the symbol in her poetry, and to argue that her Moravian upbringing formed an important foundation for early career as an imagist.<sup>8</sup>

### **Bees, Honey, and Wax in the Moravian Church**

H.D. was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where her mother's family had been prominent members in the Moravian church and community since its establishment. Her mother, Helen Wolle Doolittle, was a direct descendant of the first group of Moravians, or "Unitas Fratrum," that immigrated to America from Germany in the eighteenth century

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<sup>8</sup> The themes of war and the potential for language to reunite and heal a world at war, and the relation of these themes with the symbol of the bee, will later reappear in my discussion of *Trilogy*.

in order to escape religious persecution. H.D.'s great-grandfather—the father of her grandmother whom she calls “Mamalie” in the novel—was a silversmith, a clockmaker, and a beekeeper. In the first few pages of *The Gift*, Hilda boasts, “Wasn’t it a thing to be proud of, that Mamalie’s father made clocks? We were very proud of it. Mamalie’s father had even been asked to Philadelphia to sing in a great choral-service; he kept bees and he played the trombone at the Easter service” (2). Any time her great-grandfather is mentioned in *The Gift*, Hilda never fails to mention his association with the bees. H.D.’s grandfather, “Papalie,” was a noted biologist and the director of the Moravian seminary, and her Uncle Fred was a musician who founded the Bethlehem Bach Festival. In *The Gift*, the young Hilda feels that she is a part of a long line of “gifted” people from whom she senses she has inherited *something*—although she questions what it is until she receives the visionary gift from her grandmother when she psychically intuits an important event in Moravian history.

The Moravians were ethical business people and ardent pacifists. When they immigrated to America, they placed a great deal of emphasis on conducting mission work, especially in Native American communities. In their business transactions and in their work as missionaries, the bee played a vital intermediary role between the Moravians and other groups. Because many European immigrants, including the Moravians, brought their beekeeping skills with them to America and because honey-hunting had become popular on the frontier, bee products were eventually assimilated into the economic trading system. In her book *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee*

*Shaped a Nation*, Tammy Horn explains that, “In general, eighteenth-century America depended on a variety of inextricable and intertwined networks, and from the colonists’ perspective, the bee was a benign symbol connecting them” (42). In what would eventually become H.D.’s home state, beekeeping had become so popular by 1771 that nearly thirty-thousand pounds of beeswax was exported from Pennsylvania, prompting the state to adopt the bee as its official symbol of thrift and industry (Horn 43). By 1779, the Philadelphia Continental Congress even implemented the symbol of the bee skep on its currency (42).

Moravian pastors, such as H.D.’s great-grandfather, traditionally kept bees so that they could harvest the products they needed for church services. For example, only beeswax candles were used in services because it was thought to be the purest material available. On Christmas Eve, children carried the beeswax candles in a procession to denote the spiritual equality of the sexes (Robinson 7). Hilda describes such an event in *The Gift*:

[Papalie] was a minister, he read things out of the Bible, he said *I am the light of the world* when the doors opened at the far end of the church and the trays of lighted beeswax candles were brought into the church by the Sisters in their caps and aprons, while Uncle Fred in the gallery, at the organ was playing very softly *Holy Night*. (10)

Robinson notes that H.D. continued to observe Moravian customs throughout her life and that on important holidays she always gave beeswax candles as gifts to her close friends (6).

In addition to the symbolic value of beeswax in church services, images of bees were also featured in hymns that H.D. would have heard and sung during church services as a child. The following stanzas, for example, demonstrate the traditional association of bees with Christian souls and honey with Christ's blood:

My soul feeds on roses sweet,  
When she smells wounds-flavour,  
And reviews her safe retreat  
In thy grave, my Saviour.

Draw us to thee, and we will come  
into thy wounds deep places,  
Where hidden is the honey-comb  
Of thy sweet love's embraces

...  
Oh Meal! I can't thy sweetness be expressing  
Because thou art all thoughts and words surpassing. (Sessler 127)

The Moravian belief system places emphasis on worshipping the wounds that Christ suffered during the crucifixion. Moravians also believe that Jesus is incarnated during the holy sacrament of communion. During this rite, Jesus comes down to embrace his worshippers in order to reveal his love and his agony; worshippers then praise him and attempt to experience his suffering vicariously by meditating on his wounds (127). This redemptive rite is represented in the hymn by the bee-souls that live in Christ's wounds and feed on his blood. For Moravians, as for other Christian groups, the blood of Christ is the means to salvation; thus the conflation of Christ's blood with pure and sweet honey symbolizes the purifying and healing act of the resurrection. The sweetness of Christ's blood is also frequently combined with the salt of his sweat, for example in the line, "His

precious sweat when at work / makes all labour sweet to us” (117). The imagery of the sweetness and saltiness of Christ’s blood and sweat may have been extremely influential in H.D.’s early poetics—notably in *Sea Garden*, in which the poet frequently combines the elements of the sweet garden flowers and the salty ocean in violent, although transformative, ways.

It is crucial to note, as scholars such as Janice Robinson have, that H.D. understood the impact that the Moravian religion made on her poetic consciousness (85). One of the most significant contributions is the idea of the physicality and fluidity of the symbol since the “consciousness of H.D.’s religious heritage was highly symbolic” and “clearly and often, one thing was alluded to under the guise of another” (87). Therefore, while I argue the bee was an image connected to H.D.’s family and church as a symbol of purity, healing, and resurrection, I will demonstrate in my analysis of *The Gift* that whenever H.D. employs the symbol of the bee, she does so with the intention of uniting a confluence of meanings and associations from both her personal memory and a wider historical and literary tradition.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Beehive-Word and the Gift of Prophecy**

In *The Gift*, H.D. recalls the beginnings of her burgeoning creative sensibility and her discovery of the power of imagination as a young child. The novel begins with Hilda attempting to understand where and how she fits genealogically within her mother’s side

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the influence of Moravianism on H.D.’s early imagist poetics, see: Robinson, Janice S. “Imagism and Moravianism.” *H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1982. 81-90. Print.

of the family in order to determine the likelihood of possessing a talent, or “gift,” like her family members. Although she intuits that she is an “inheritor” of *something* from her mother and her grandmother, Hilda cannot make sense of what she has inherited or how to articulate it. “The gift was there,” she says, “but the expression of the gift was somewhere else” (4). Clearly a bibliophile with a penchant for fantasy from an early age, Hilda loved to read stories from her favorite *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* and Greek myths on a nightly basis. The emphasis on the arts in her home and the stories she read would nurture H.D.’s emerging love of words and provide the foundation for her artistic sensibility.

Recognizing the potential of art and sensing her own possession of a gift, Hilda frequently questions what being “gifted” means. Her mother explains to her that “artists are people who are gifted” (18). It was assumed that the children born to a Moravian family would be gifted with a talent for music. However, Hilda knows that she does not possess such a talent, and she feels resentful that her mother “gave” this gift to her uncle instead of to herself and her brothers: “Mama gave all her music to Uncle Fred, that is what she did. That is why we hadn’t the gift, because it was Mama who started being the musician, and then she said she taught Uncle Fred” (12). She senses, however, that “there were other gifts, it seemed” (12). She hints at this “other gift” in her account of how her mother went to a fortune-teller who told her that she would have a child who was “in some way especially gifted” (21). Hilda remarks, “I do not remember when she first told me about it, yet I remember the strange gap in consciousness, the sort of

emptiness there, which I soon covered over with my childish philosophy or logic” (21). Although she questions herself as an artistically gifted person, Hilda senses something about her conscious that is different and that allows her to perceive things that others cannot.

While the emphasis on art, music, and literature formed the foundation of her creative sensibility, the event that truly sparks Hilda’s imagination and inspires her to explore the potentially unifying power of art is her first experience at a theatrical performance. As she relates the experience of watching the play, a touring production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Hilda describes the incredible imaginative power it holds over her. While she recognizes that she is merely watching a performance, she is so captivated by it that she feels forever changed by the experience. Though she is keenly aware of her physical surroundings while she watches the play, she feels that there is “something else” inside her that “listens” during the performance. This ability to “listen” with her imagination helps her to suspend disbelief and to fully immerse herself in the experience of the theater. As a result, she says, “You forgot the people around you and that you were in the theater, you forgot you were in a town even, that you would have to go home after this” (15). Following the play, Hilda comments that suddenly, “Everything was the same, but everything was different” (21). She embraces the possibility of seeing the world for more than what it appears to be on the surface and she begins to recognize potential power of submitting to her imagination:



Oh well, I know it was only Little Eva in a jerry-built, gold chariot, and yet it was the very dawn of art, it was the sun, the drama, the theater, it was poetry—why, it was music, it was folklore and folksong, it was history . . . It was art or many of the arts, concentrated and maybe consecrated by the fixed gaze of these same American children, who in the intensity of their naïve yet inherent or inherited perception, glorifying these shoddy strolling players, became one with their visionary mid-European ancestors and their Elizabethen [sic] English forebears. (18)

Although she hasn't yet found the expression of her gift specifically, she senses that losing herself in creative performance and immersing herself in stories and pictures is an act that can unite her with her visionary ancestors and their forebears. This realization prepares her for the moment that she is presented with her own visionary gift from Mamalie.

In the same way the world seems different to her after she sees the play, Hilda also finds that she gets “lost” in language, especially when her family members speak German: “It is the same when Papa calls me *Töchterlein* [daughter], it simply makes everything quite different” (82). Ultimately, her grandmother's utterance of the words *Gnadenhuetten* and *Wunden Eiland* trigger the event of the passing on of the gift. The words themselves, moreover, help to psychically unite Hilda to her Moravian ancestors. Although she can't translate the words for herself, she can feel that she is somehow implicated in them: “I am in the word, I am *Gnadenhuetten* the way Mamalie says it, though I do not know what it means” (82).

The night that Hilda “inherits” the gift, she is awakened by her father's students who came from the university to visit his observatory and were talking outside of her

bedroom window. She hears the group suddenly say “*ah*” at the sight of a shooting star, which incites her fear that a shooting star could crash into the earth and burn her alive. Hilda’s fear of the shooting star parallels the event that she intuits from her Mamalie, but is ultimately triggered, for H.D., by the air raid occurring outside of her apartment as she writes the novel. As Hilda thinks about the star, she hears Mamalie stirring downstairs and she is compelled to go talk to her. As the two converse, Hilda tunes in to her grandmother’s conscious and is able to implicitly understand the thoughts and stories that Mamalie doesn’t verbally articulate. Hilda asks Mamalie whether shooting stars can crash into the earth; the question sparks Mamalie’s memory of the events at Gnadenhuetten, where flaming arrows fired by insulted Native Americans rained down on a Moravian community after a failed attempt to unify the two groups at Wunden Eiland, or the Island of Wounds, more than one hundred years earlier. As Hilda sits with her grandmother, she holds back innumerable questions and thinks, “I am not afraid now to think about the shooting star because I think she is going to talk about the shooting star in a way that isn’t gravitation” (78).

At Mamalie’s utterance of *Gnadenhuetten* and *Wunden Eiland*, Hilda is transported to another plane of reality where she slowly begins to perceive the story behind these words. In the mid-eighteenth century, a group of Moravian missionaries planned to meet with members of the Delaware tribe on an island near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to perform a ritual they believed could unite the Christian with the Indian god. Adalaide Morris explains that “the pact was a plan to have a meeting at which they

would enact one of the most ancient rituals of connection; the exchange of women” (74). Furthermore, the two groups thought that “when the Moravian Anna von Pahlen is initiated into the Indian mysteries and the Indian, Morning Star, is baptized a Moravian, they exchange inner names and the pact between the two tribes is sealed” (Morris 74). The more conservative Moravians eventually forbade this ceremony from taking place; this angered the Native Americans, compelling them to retaliate by burning down the Moravian settlement at Gnadenhuetten. In an autobiographical essay that H.D. wrote in 1949-50 using her *nom de plume*, Delia Alton, she explains the significance of this moment in the story of Wunden Eiland:

Through Mamalie, the Child traces back her connection with the *Jed nota* in Europe and with the vanished tribes of the Six Nations in America, with whom Zinzendorf had made a curious, unprecedented treaty. In fantasy or dream, the grandmother tells the story of Wunden Eiland, an actual island which was later actually and symbolically washed away in the spring-floods. On this island, certain of the community met delegates of the Six Nations, who planned together to save the country (and the world) from further blood-shed. Through the grandmother's submerged consciousness, runs the fear and terror of the arrow that flieth, torture and death by burning. (189)

Hilda's fear of being burned by the shooting star is thus not just an inconsequential childhood fear, but an intuitive vision that links her to her Moravian ancestors who were burned by the flaming arrows. Additionally, Hilda warns, “It was not just a thing that had happened even in the days of Papalie's grandfather, it was something that might still happen” (96). Here, she suggests that the retaliation that resulted from the two tribes' failure to spiritually unite is the cause of the events of the modern World Wars. Morris

posits that “for H.D., the meeting [at Gnadenhuetten] marks the confluence of two great streams carrying ancient secrets of the gift, one flowing eastward from Asia, China, and Tibet, to the Indians, the other flowing westward from the Knights Templar and the Cathars to the Moravians” (74). Ultimately, the failure to unite these disparate groups of people and their respective cosmologies causes the fragmentation of contemporary consciousness, and one consequence is the air raid that occurs outside of H.D.’s London flat as she writes her novel.

Despite the emotional and psychological torment that the London Blitz causes, it is this incident that allows H.D. to open the wounds from her past and to rediscover the moment she inherited the gift from Mamalíe. “I did not know, as Mamalíe began talking,” H.D. explains, “that *Wunden Eiland* was Island of the Wounds; it came clear afterwards” (85). Because of the multi-layered resonances of the “wound” in H.D.’s life and religion, it is crucial that in the precise moment in which Hilda inherits the gift, she imagines the word *Wunden Eiland* as a beehive and herself as the “last bee” in it. She says,

The word is like a beehive, but there are no bees in it now. I am the last bee in the beehive, this is the game I play. The other bees have gone, that is why it is so quiet. Can one bee keep a beehive alive; I mean, can one person who knows that *Wunden Eiland* is a beehive, keep *Wunden Eiland* for the other bees when they come back? (83)

As the last bee in the beehive, she sees herself as a final “inheritor” and sole bearer of secret knowledge, the meaning of which lies within both the word itself and the wound.

However simply the image of the bee may seem to appear in this passage, H.D. uses the bee because it is so encoded—indeed, it embodies—such a multitude of meanings and associations for her which have to do with her Moravian past, her visionary and creative “gift,” and ultimately, with her artistic vision. Like the bee-souls that feed on Christ’s honey-sweet blood in Moravian hymns, here the young Hilda is the sole bee left in the beehive-wound-word. The conflation of the body of Christ with text itself signifies the power of the Word—that is, the memory behind “Wunden Eiland,” as well as the act of writing—to provide healing and the potential for redemption. The beehive-wound and the bee’s association with divine origin also affirm the sanctity of such a visionary gift. Finally, it is through experiencing the wound—by vicariously suffering the events of Gnadenhuetten and inheriting the Word—that H.D. can potentially rectify the wrongdoings of the past and help to heal both herself and the world at war.

H.D.’s inheritance of the visionary gift through a German word which recalls an important event in Moravian history as imagined through the symbol of the bee facilitates her attempt to re-connect with her maternal roots and her Moravian ancestors and to reclaim her sense of being an artistically gifted person. H.D. always felt, moreover, that her Moravian roots actually extended further back in history and had their true origins in Greek culture. In *The Gift*, Hilda intuits this information from Mamalie, although she questions whether she knew for sure: “maybe I dreamed that Mamalie said that our church-beginnings went back to the ninth century (and that would be a thousand years ago) and that there was a branch of the church that was called the *Calixines* that had

something to do with a Greek word” (94). Likewise, the bee has ancient associations beyond her Moravian roots. H.D. represents her poetic and prophetic gift with the symbol of the bee and asserts her intuitive abilities to access and understand the past, present, and the future.<sup>10</sup> In imagining herself as the bee, she understands that she carries knowledge that is not only sacred to her personal past but that is also sacred in human history. This knowledge is contained in the Word and, in the same way that she imagines herself united with her visionary forebears after watching *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she senses that the creative expression of language is what will help her help to mend and unify the collective consciousness. Like the bee, the gift itself is believed to be of divine origin and affirms for H.D. the sacred role of the poet-prophet in a modern secular society.

H.D.’s memory of her gift additionally helps her to reclaim her maternal heritage and to heal her own psyche from past trauma. Graham argues that by uncovering the traumatic incident, H.D. “found her way past the dominance of the father to a maternal heritage” (303). Furthermore, it is in telling the story of her maternal heritage, as Diane Chisholm explains, that H.D. is able to recover a “sense of being gifted, of regaining possession of the repressed and suppressed musical and psychological gifts of her mother(s)” (108). The symbol of the bee thus helps H.D. to imagine and articulate the recognition and reclamation of her gift; furthermore, her re-possession of the gift helps her to envision the possibility of healing her own and the collective war-fractured

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<sup>10</sup> The poet-prophet’s knowledge and understanding of the ancient past will be pertinent to my discussion of both *Sea Garden* and *Trilogy*, albeit in different ways. In *Sea Garden*, this ability will give the poet access to ancient ideals of beauty to implement in her own poetry while the poet/scribe’s access to the ancient past through language is an important theme that will be especially resonant in my discussion of *Trilogy*.

consciousness, visually represented at the end of *The Gift* with the conflation of a choir of Moravian men and the humming of bees.

In the same way that the young Hilda was terrified that a shooting star would fall on her house and burn her to death, at the end of the novel, the adult H.D. sits terrified in her apartment during a bombing raid. Nevertheless, having uncovered the traumatic events of the past, realizing her visionary gift, and facing her childhood fear of the shooting star, she begins to gather courage. She feels that she has “passed the flame” and “had [her] initiation” and concludes that “it had been worthwhile to prove to oneself that one’s mind and body could endure the very worst that life had to offer . . . to be driven down and down to the uttermost depth of subconscious terror and to be able to rise again” (136-137). After thoroughly exploring her past, H.D. is able to find herself present in the moment, “not frozen into another dimension but here in time, in clock-time,” and she is ready to face the horrors of the Blitz (140). Following the air raid, she finally gets up and pauses for a moment of reflection—both literally and metaphorically:

I stand by the kitchen door opposite the mirror, *in a glass darkly*. But now face to face. We have been face to face with the final realities. We have been shaken out of our ordinary dimension in time and we have crossed the chasm that divides time from out-of-time or from what they call eternity. (141)

At this moment, she begins to imagine the events at Wunden Eiland, had they been successfully realized. In her vision, she hears Christian Renatus<sup>11</sup> singing and underneath

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<sup>11</sup> Diane Chisholm explains that Mamalie’s first husband, Christian, discovered the deerskin parchment on which the dialogues, pledges, and songs of the initiates had been recorded in many languages. Christian

his voice she hears the “deep bee-like humming of the choir of Single Brothers” and the “deeper sustained bass note that must have been Christian David who had a voice like my great-grandfather who made clocks and kept bees and was called *princeps facile* of musicians” (141). The deep humming of the choir of men is a sonic replacement for the bombing; however, it is additionally a signifier for potential healing that can be attained through the expression of creativity and music, and by reconnecting with the past and examining wounds, both old and new. As this vision continues, H.D. also begins to understand the connection between the events at Wunden Eiland and the state of the modern world. She imagines:

Now Golden Eagle with his arrows, has driven off the enemy, it is a cry and it is a liturgy, the litany of the wounds; pity us, sings Christian David deep deep down so that the even flow of subdued bee-like humming of the choir of Single Brothers seems like a swarm of bees around the deep bell ringing, ringing in Christian David’s throat; pity us, he says every time that the young Count Christian Renatus pronounces another one of his single strophes of his liturgy of the wounds. Our earth is a wounded island as we swing around the sun. (142)

H.D. then hears the choir of Indians singing and speaking in their own language as the women, the Moravian Anna von Pahlen and the Indian Morning Star, are exchanged in

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attempted to decode the parchment while Mamalie contributed by “transposing the accents and rhythms of the next into living song”; it is by “reading it with her ear” that “she was able to transmit the ‘spirit’ that had been encrypted there for all eternity” (117). Mamalie then reveals her “gift” by speaking in tongues: by “singing with no words or with words of leaves rustling and rivers flowing and snow swirling in the wind . . . the breath of the Spirit” (88 *The Gift*). Mamalie and Christian had to keep their discovery a secret because they would have been suspected of witchcraft. In *The Gift*, Hilda “conflates Mamalie’s description of the ‘burning’ of Wunden Eiland’s mystic passion with the destruction of Gnadenheutten by fire” (118). Mamalie is then linked to the other initiates because she can speak the mystical language and she is “burned up” metaphorically like the initiates: in her passion and she also nearly died of a fever. H.D. becomes an initiate when she inherits the gift from her mother(s) and then nearly experiences her own Gnadenheutten during the bombardment of London (118).



the ritual of the wounds, until all of the voices come together in “one voice.”<sup>12</sup> The bee-like humming of the Moravian choir, which is joined by Indian voices, signifies a spiritual unification through creativity and language. The healing of these warring factions can only be realized through H.D.’s maternal gift of prophetic vision, as imagined through the symbol of the beehive and the bee, which is ultimately manifested by H.D.’s novel.

In her biography of H.D., Janice Robinson writes that to fully understand and appreciate H.D.’s life and poetry, “We must remember that H.D. grew up in the late nineteenth century in a prominent Moravian family and in a community that was for the most part Moravian” (86). I contend that H.D.’s familial and imaginative association with bees via the Moravian church as a young child would have later inspired her use of this symbol in her poetry, and would have made her more attentive and receptive to it when she encountered it in the literature she read and cultures she studied as an adult. Moreover, having numerous sources from which gather associations with the bee eventually allowed H.D. to use it with fluidity in her writing. That is, true to imagist doctrine, the symbol is concrete and concise, yet also complex and rich with meanings. In *The Gift*, the bee presents us with one example of an important “hieroglyph” of H.D.’s unconscious: as a symbol representative of a suppressed event that she needed to explore by writing her novel, the bee allowed H.D. to recognize and reclaim her visionary gift.

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<sup>12</sup> Baring and Cashford note that in ancient times, “The humming of the bee was actually heard as the ‘voice’ of the goddess, the ‘sound’ of creation” (119).

CHAPTER III  
THE BEE IN H.D.'S EARLY WORK

The bee was a prominent figure in H.D.'s early poetry and prose as a symbol that represented her as a poet that allowed her figurative access to the aesthetic and spiritual ideals of the past. In this chapter, my analysis of H.D.'s novel, *HERmione*, will present evidence that the bee, as a visual representation of her protagonist—and, by extension, of the writer herself—is an image with which H.D. identified as a young poet. I will then examine how the bee symbol functions in H.D.'s first volume of poetry, *Sea Garden*, in which the poet depicts herself as an aged bee-poet that must remember ancient “splendour” and await “new beauty.” In the final section of this chapter, and owing to H.D.'s specific mention of the work in *HERmione*, I will discuss the probable influence of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee* on two *Sea Garden* poems, “Prisoners” and “Cities.”

***HERmione* and the “fabulous bee”**

H.D. was working on her semi-autobiographical novel *HERmione* as early as 1927, although it was not published until 1981, twenty years after her death.<sup>13</sup> The novel chronicles events from H.D.'s life from the years between 1907 and 1911, during which

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D.'s literary executor, had a typescript of the novel that H.D. had been heavily revising leading up to her death in 1961.

time she lived with her parents after withdrawing from Bryn Mawr College.<sup>14</sup> Other important autobiographical events portrayed in the novel include H.D.'s relationship with Ezra Pound ("George Lowndes") and her introduction to Frances Josepha Gregg ("Fayne Rabb"), with whom H.D. travelled to Europe in 1911. In this *Künstlerroman*, H.D. paints a portrait of herself as a young artist named Hermione Gart, a woman in her twenties who struggles to find herself and to articulate her identity. Before she is able to explore and express herself through mythology, psychology, and poetry, Hermione can merely intuit her sense of self through images which she cannot fully explain. The bee is one essential image which represents for Hermione the precise "visual image of the sort of thing she sought for," although she does not, or cannot, explain why (13). I argue that the image stands in for the words that Hermione cannot yet formulate for herself and, because of its traditional association with poets and prophets, foreshadows what she will eventually become. The bee is also connected to both of her love interests, George and Fayne, a fellow poet and a "prophetess," respectively. The symbol of the bee in *HERmione* therefore embodies a confluence of associations and meanings, each of which is essential for helping Hermione to define herself as a burgeoning poet.

Having failed at "conic sections" at Bryn Mawr, Hermione returns home at the beginning of the novel with no sense of purpose for her life. She feels that she has been pushed too far by her father, a university professor of astronomy, "toward a biological-mathematical definition of the universe" which "eluded her perception" (6). Hermione's

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<sup>14</sup> While *HERmione* covers events from these five years of H.D.'s life, the plot of the novel is actually condensed into a timespan of about nine months.

failure at conic sections is indicative of her inability to define herself; that is, in the same way that she fails to understand the mathematics of concentric circles, she lacks the ability to comprehend the “patchwork of indefinable association[s]” in her mind (24). This parallel is made obvious by the novel’s opening, in which Hermione’s mind goes “round in circles” as she repeats, “I am Her . . . I am Her, Her, Her . . . I am Hermione Gart precisely,” almost as if to convince herself of her own existence (3). Unable self-actualize through language, for “she found that ‘I am Her Gart’ didn’t let her hold on” (4), Hermione is torn between her parents’ divergent personalities and is “broken like a nut between two rocks, granite and granite” (81). She feels that she cannot live up to the standards of her objective, mathematically-minded father and, intuitively embracing her penchant for creativity, she is inspired by her mother’s artistic gifts, but regrets that she was never encouraged to develop her own creative talents. As a “disappointment to her father, an odd duckling to her mother,” Hermione concludes that she is an “importunate overgrown, unincarnated entity” (10) with no place in the world, and she struggles to find where she belongs:

She was not of the world, she was not in the world, unhappily she was not out of the world. She wanted to be out, get out but even as her mind filmed over with grey-gelatinous substance of some sort of nonthinking, of some sort of nonbeing or of nonentity, she felt a psychic claw unsheathe somewhere, felt herself clutch toward something that had no name. (8)

Reminiscent of her artistic and visionary gift which she sensed from the time of her childhood, Hermione clutches at “something” within herself. Without words to articulate

the feelings she intuits from “nonthinking,” however, she feels that she at least “must have an image” in her mind to help her to visualize her thoughts, “no matter how fluid, how inchoate” the image may seem (5).

In a pivotal moment in the beginning of the novel, as Hermione contemplates her failure at college and laments that she was not encouraged by her mother to pursue music, she finds that she must abandon language altogether as a way of voicing her disappointment. She instead finds herself enthralled with a vision of an image of a bee eclipsing the sun:

Music might have caught the trail of the grass as she ran on across the meadow and the deep note made by a fabulous bee that sprung into vision, blotting out the edge of the stables, almost blotting out the sun itself with its magnified magnificent underbelly and the roar of its sort of booming. The boom of the bee in her ear, his presence like an eclipse across the sun brought the visual image of the sort of thing she sought for . . . it had not occurred to Her to try and put the thing in writing. (13)

Because “she could put no name to the things she apprehended,” Hermione’s perception of the image of the bee defies her ability to articulate its significance (13). The image is thus a visual and imaginative substitute for the words that Hermione can neither comprehend nor communicate for herself.

Because H.D. associated her creative talents with her maternally-inherited visionary “gift,” the connection of the vision of the bee to Hermione’s mother, Eugenia Gart, is unambiguous. I argue, therefore, that in her vision of the bee, Hermione expresses her desire to be like her mother, who has a natural talent for music and whose

words wield tremendous power in her daughter's mind. Despite her disappointment that Eugenia didn't put forth a greater effort to develop Her's creative talents, and although she remains critical that her mother abandoned her own gifts in order to conform to the expectations required of a domesticated mother and wife, Hermione maintains an unequivocal admiration for her nonetheless. As the wife of a university professor, Eugenia's abilities often go unsung in the Gart household; however, Hermione insists that her father, Carl, "wasn't brilliant like Eugenia," for "the words of Eugenia had more power than textbooks, than geometry, than all of Carl Gart and brilliant 'Bertie Gart' [Hermione's brother]" (89). Ardently venerating her mother, Hermione proclaims: "One should sing hymns of worship to her, powerful, powerless, all-powerful" (81). Knowing she has no talent for music herself—which she even equates with the "conic sections" she failed at in college (6)—Hermione attempts to find refuge in the world of words. She struggles, however, to understand the relationship between words, objects and people; she repeats several times that "things make people, people make things" (25) but vaguely concludes that "everything was something to everyone but nothing was anything to Her" (29). To Hermione, words "beat and sizzle" (15), form "unformulated syllables" (25) and "make tin pan noises" in her ear (42). Due to her sensitivity and perception of language, Hermione recognizes that words are both her "plague" and her "redemption," for "almost, almost she heard words" (67). Until she is able to find the words to express herself, Hermione must cling to images—such as that of the bee—which help her to define herself and to make sense of her emotions.

Although she rejects her father's "mathematical-biological definition of the universe," Hermione's only means to understand her vision of the bee involves a quasi-scientific exploration of it, which, like language, eludes her perception. Hermione remains entranced in her vision of the bee as she collects the mail to take to her brother's fiancée, Minnie. Attempting not to lose sight of her imagination as she completes this mundane task,

Her fumbled with the lot, trying not to have to obliterate the memory of an eclipse of the sun by a huge bee (under a magnifying glass) by having to look at Minnie. A huge bee lifted Her on translucent wings, flung straight upward, her legs either side of the stiff propeller-whirr of the wings, hung down into space . . . Her rode toward a new realization . . . (14)

The original image of the bee eclipsing the sun is thus conflated with that of a bee underneath a magnifying glass and, as she studies the bee's "magnified magnificent underbelly" under the light of the sun (reminiscent of a microscope), she imagines herself riding on the bee and "toward a new realization" (14). Without extensive knowledge of psychology, mythology, and poetry—the three essential fields that helped H.D. to explore to express herself as an adult—Hermione is at first inclined to view the bee only as a separate biological entity, albeit an imagined one, rather than as a representation of herself. Unable to understand the bee's significance either biologically or symbolically, however, Hermione only dimly perceives that the bee will lead her to a "new realization" as she imagines herself riding on its back.

Although Hermione does not, or cannot, immediately comprehend why the bee represents what it is she seeks for herself, it is clear that the image of the bee, as precisely the “sort of thing she sought for” which begins to lead her to a “new realization,” symbolizes what Hermione will become. Moreover, the bee’s traditional association with poets provides further evidence that the image functions to foreshadow Hermione’s identity as a poet. At this stage of her life, it does not occur to Hermione to “put the thing in writing.” Nevertheless, Hermione’s reaction to language and her sensitivity to words—reminiscent of the behavior portrayed by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—are early indicators of her artistic gift which she is only beginning to develop at this point in her life. Furthermore, this extremely meaningful symbol does eventually appear in some of H.D.’s earliest poems in which the poet depicts herself as a bee. This passage of Hermione’s vision of the “fabulous” bee therefore provides ample evidence that H.D. identified with the bee as a symbol that represented her as a poet—or in the case of Hermione, as a blossoming poet.

Hermione continues to develop her artistic identity outside of the context of her nuclear family with the influence of her two love interests, both of whom she associates with the bee. Hermione first begins to flourish with the guidance of her fiancé, George Lowndes, a poet and the “high-water mark of the intelligentsia of the period” (71). Her relationship with George allows Hermione to begin to explore her talent for writing poetry. Furthermore, George instructs Hermione in what to read and how to think about



literature.<sup>15</sup> In the same way that her mother's words enrapture her, so too do the words of George Lowndes seem to hold the key to Hermione's future. She relies on George, whom she desperately hopes can "incarnate" her, to help her to become a woman simply by the power of his words:

She wanted George as a child wants a doll, whose other dolls are broken. She wanted George as a little girl wants to put her hair up or to wear long skirts. She wanted George with some uncorrelated sector of Her Gart, she wanted George to correlate for her, life here, there. She wanted George to define and to make definable a mirage, a reflection of some lost incarnation, a wood maniac, a tree demon, a neuropathic dendrophil . . . She wanted George to make one of his drastic statements that would dynamite her world away for her. She wanted this, but even as she wanted it she let herself sink further, further, she saw that her two hands reached toward George like the hands of a drowned girl. (63)

George educates Hermione and encourages her to write, but his words are merely substitutes for her own, leaving her feeling smothered and "drowned" by his affection. She recognizes, however, that "the kisses of George smudged out her clear geometric thought" and that "his words had given her something" (73). It is only with George's influence that Hermione is able to overcome her sense of failing her father and can begin to claim her identity as a poet: "Words may be my heritage and with words I will prove conic sections a falsity . . . mythopoeic mind (mine) will disprove science and biological-mathematic definition" (76). Unlike science and music, in Hermione's mind, writing has "nothing or very little to do with the fact of cones of green set within green cones" (71). While she initially associates George with writing and benefits from his guidance,

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<sup>15</sup> Among the works George proffers to Hermione is Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee*, which I shall explore in the final section of this chapter..

Hermione is artistically stifled by his intense personality and recognizes that “even in his advanced progress [he] could make no dynamic statement that would assure her mind that writing had to do with the underside of a peony petal that covered the whole of a house like a nutshell housing woodgnats” (71).

Smothered by George and dissatisfied with their conventional relationship, Hermione realizes that she will never marry him. In an attempt to inform him that she wants to break off their engagement, Hermione telephones George’s house but instead finds herself on the line with his mother, Lillian. Hermione chats mechanically on the phone with Lillian, and is again enthralled with another vision of a bee:

A voice far and far, the merest bee in a flower voice . . . A bee in a flower, there was a bee shut up inside the telephone receiver, there was a murmur of the sea, far places, ships shut up in the telephone receiver. Hermione pressed the telephone receiver to her ear as a child presses a round shell. She listened as a child may listen to the murmur of far waters. There was the sea and far places and little seaports and sunlight slanting across a Tintoretto . . . She was connected with ships, with people sitting around a table and with Christ lifting a chiseled bowl embossed with Renaissance grape leaves. George like a showman was in that odd far voice, shut up in a shell voice, bee droning in a flower voice, ‘I have so much to tell you.’ (103)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In 1928, H.D. published *Hedylus*, which contains a nearly identical passage: “‘You asked me to go to Egypt. To go to India. Demetrius’ corridor spun round and round your words. The lily-vestibule and the lily-corridor were that simply. I was imprisoned in a great flower and your words were bees (O your voice) droning their numbing message. There was (those bee-notes intoned) absolute beauty, love for Hedyle. I was so numb with your astute beauty that I stared at you, and you knew though I did not say it that I could not, no, *would* not go with you to India . . .’” (135). Here, Hedylus, a courtesan and mother of Hedyle, tells her lover that she wouldn’t go with him to India, and prefers to live independently in Greece. The passage demonstrates, again, H.D.’s frequent use of bees and their association with language (“your words were bees”).

Undoubtedly due to her sensitivity to names and her proclivity for word associations—a kind of poetic alchemy for which H.D. is well-known—Hermione conflates Lillian’s voice with a bee’s “flower voice” because of her floral name. The image and sound of the bee in a flower is then fused with the sound of the sea arising from a shell.<sup>17</sup> Through this web of associations, Hermione imagines herself being transported across the sea and she becomes connected with her artistic European forebears, indicated by the Tintoretto painting and “Renaissance grape leaves.” Finally, as her vision culminates, Hermione reveals that implicated in each of the voices in her vision—the “far voice,” the “shell voice,” and the “bee droning in flower voice”—is George himself. That is, because he is a poet recently returned home from Europe, Hermione logically connects George to the images of the bee, the sea, and art.

Despite her need to end their romantic relationship, Hermione finds George an influential mentor who embodies what she hopes to become. Indeed, it was with support and guidance from the real-life George Lowndes (i.e. Pound) that H.D. was able to begin her career as an *imagiste* in 1913. This vision of the bee is yet another representation of what Hermione seeks for herself because of its connection to George, a poet who has traveled beyond the country that Hermione finds restrictive, for she feels that “another country called her, the only thing that would heal, that would blot out this concentric gelatinous substance that was her perception of trees grown closer” (6-7). Analogous to her previous vision of the “fabulous bee,” this vision hints at a “new realization” of which

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly reminiscent of these passages, Gregory argues that “the dominant voice in *Sea Garden* comes from within the sea-washed flower” (142).

Hermione is in search, as it anticipates her eventual move to Europe to become a poet. Nevertheless, in her vision, the bee and the sea are only “voices” that she hears “shut up” and far off in the distance. And though she vaguely perceives the significance of these images, they seem to be yet unobtainable and inarticulable realities.

The conflation of the bee in a flower with the sounds of the sea in a shell functions to imaginatively transport Hermione to sea ports across the world where she finds herself sitting with Christ himself as depicted in Jacopo Tintoretto’s *Last Supper*. The bee is therefore not only a substitute for George as a poet and as a model for what Hermione will become, but also a symbol with both trans-historical and transnational resonances. That is, the bee here exceeds geographical boundaries for its association with the sea and travel; and it likewise transcends time, for as Hermione imagines herself crossing the Atlantic, she feels connected to her European artistic ancestors and, in envisioning a Renaissance painting, finds herself within the painting itself. Similar to the young Hilda’s conclusion after watching *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in *The Gift*, through her vision of the bee and the images associated with it, Hermione perceives the potentially unifying power of art which can connect people across time and space.<sup>18</sup>

Stifled by George’s infatuation and erudition, Hermione begins an erotic friendship with Fayne Rabb, a young woman whom she meets through a classmate at Bryn Mawr. Unlike George who force-feeds Hermione his own thoughts and words,

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<sup>18</sup> In my discussion of H.D.’s poetry, I shall argue that she employed the bee symbol as a representation of herself as a poet primarily because it is an ancient image that symbolizes the poet’s ability to unify disparate groups of people through language and poetry.

Fayne almost forcibly removes words from Hermione: “the hand of Fayne Rabb dragged words out of the throat of Her Gart” (145). Hermione recognizes Fayne as a fellow prophetess and even compares her to a “young Pythian priestess” (99). In other words, Fayne actually embodies a contemporary version of Apollo’s bee-prophet, the Delphic Bee, who uttered oracles at the Temple at Delphi. As the two women sit opposite one another over tea, Hermione attempts to “read” the “delphic patterns” in the dishes on the floor:

Words with Fayne in a room, in any room, became projections of things beyond one. Things beyond Her beat, beat to go through Her, to get through to Fayne. So prophetess faced prophetess over tea plates scattered and two teacups making delphic pattern on a worn carpet. (146)

Again Hermione clings to images or objects (i.e. tea dishes) as substitutes for words; however, doing so in the presence of Fayne allows her to perceive meaning beyond that which language can communicate. Hermione ultimately sees in Fayne a projection of herself: “Fayne being me, I was her. Fayne being Her I was Fayne. Fayne being Her was HER so that Her saw Fayne” (210). As a version of the Delphic bee and a prophetess, Fayne mirrors for Hermione what she will become—not only a poet, but a visionary whose acute perception of language contains knowledge from the ancient past.

At the novel’s close, Hermione, newly recovered from a psychotic breakdown, is finally “practical and at one with herself, with the world, with all outer circumstance,” as she contemplates a trip to Europe with the Farrands, a neighboring family to the Garts (234). In reality, H.D. would make the trip with Frances Gregg and Gregg’s mother.

Warned by Pound that she would ruin Gregg's chance at happiness if she returned with her to America, however, H.D. reluctantly remained in Europe. This would prove to be a beneficial decision. H.D. and Pound remained critical figures in each other's lives and art: H.D. as Pound's muse, and Pound as H.D.'s mentor and editor. Two years after she arrived in Europe, and with the help of Pound who edited her poems and sent them to Harriet Monroe, H.D. had her first few poems published in *Poetry*. More than a decade following the publication of her first collection of poetry, *Sea Garden* (1916), H.D. would begin working on *HERmione*, the story of who she was before she became "H.D., Imagiste." Through her use of the bee in this novel, it is clear that the bee was a symbol that H.D. associated with her very identity as a poet, for it is an embodiment of the "sort of thing [Hermione] sought for" as a young woman. Additionally, the bee's association with George, a well-traveled poet, and Fayne, the "young Pythian priestess," indicates the importance of this symbol for its connection to the loved ones who helped H.D. to become the visionary poet she was.

### ***Sea Garden: Sappho and the Bee-Poet***

The self-conscious creation of a new kind of poetry was at the forefront of the H.D.'s mind when she and Ezra Pound were preparing her first poems for publication in 1912. In 1916, she published the *Sea Garden* poems in which she envisioned herself as a kind of poet-initiate whose act of "remembrance" of ancient beauty functioned as part of her poetic rite of passage which ultimately allowed her to find a new mode of expression by defining her own ideal of beauty. Like her fellow Modernists, H.D.'s aim was to write

poems that contained aesthetic remnants of the distant past but that also aspired to be something entirely new. H.D.'s first collection is implicitly poetry about writing poetry, and that the journey of the poet through the sea garden as an initiate is indicative of H.D.'s attempt to break from the literary tradition that preceded her while simultaneously aligning herself with her ancient literary forebears. This journey is finally reenacted in the concluding poem of the collection, "Cities," in which the worker bee's recollection of "old splendour" and its task to await "new beauty" parallels the poet's nostalgia for ancient aesthetic ideals and her struggles throughout *Sea Garden* to reveal and extract the essential—as opposed to the artificial—beauty of flowers. In my analysis of *Sea Garden*, I shall argue that the creation of these poems is an offering to, as well as a poetic incarnation of, Sappho; in the final poem, moreover, the two poets are finally united in the image of the exchange of the breath of the spirits through which H.D. receives the Sapphic gift of poetic expression. In sum, the sea garden *is* the imaginative landscape of the poet's mind—which is additionally conceived of by H.D. as the poetic embodiment of Sappho—and the bee, a symbol of the poet herself, is an essential image that functions to help H.D. to envision the kind of poetry she wants to write by giving her a way, literally and metaphorically, to imagine access to this space in order to ultimately receive the Sapphic gift of poetic expression.

Bees explicitly appear in one of H.D.'s earliest published poems, "Priapus" (later re-titled "Orchard" in *Sea Garden*), which was included, along with "Epigram" and "Hermes of the Ways," in the January 1913 issue of *Poetry*. Priapus, a minor fertility

god and the protector of orchards and bees, is known for his grotesque and “rough-hewn” appearance as well as his permanently erect, although impotent, phallus. Sculptures of him were frequently placed in gardens to provide protection for the orchard and to promote an abundant harvest (Pondrom 93). In the poem, however, it is the speaker who prays to Priapus for her own protection from the bounty and the beauty of the orchard. As she witnesses the “first pear” falling from a branch, she too falls prostrate and cries out to Priapus, “you have flayed us / with your blossoms,” and she begs the unsightly god to “spare us the beauty / of fruit-trees” (28). In contrast to the “honey-seeking” bees that swarm straight to the horde and plunder, the speaker pauses to gather the fallen fruit in order to make an offering to the “alone unbeautiful” god. An examination of the linguistic alignment of the speaker with each of the images in this poem illustrates how the landscapes of *Sea Garden* function as a kind of objective correlative for the poet’s imagination. Understanding H.D.’s identification with the images ultimately allows the reader to explore the poet’s process of creation that the sea garden both embodies and impels.

The fruits of the offering presented to Priapus in “Orchard” have, like the speaker herself, fallen and been “flayed”: the hazel-nuts are “stripped”; the berries have burst open and drip wine; and the pomegranates are “broken” (29). The speaker’s use of the first-person plural pronoun (“spare *us* from loveliness”) additionally implicates her inclusion in “the yellow swarm.” She reinforces her identification as one of the bees by praying for protection from Priapus, guardian of bees. Yet she also emphasizes her



distinction from the rest of the “honey-seeking”: diverging from the others, she falls to the ground and repeats, “I alone was prostrate” (28). Her use of the word “alone” connects her to Priapus, “alone unbeautiful.” The speaker thus links herself to each image of the poem by ascribing similar, if not identical, adjectives to herself and to the images of the fruit, the bees, and the god. We can conclude that these images collectively represent the imaginative landscape of the poet’s mind—she *is* every part of it.

Susan Stanford Friedman asserts that most of H.D.’s early imagist poems are about “consciousness, not the world of objects external to consciousness” (*Psyche Reborn* 56). Eileen Gregory similarly affirms that H.D.’s poems “are a ground, an enduring subtext, for imagination” (138). Finally, Cassandra Laity argues that *Sea Garden* “establishes a dialectic between the dense ‘sheltered garden’ that ‘chokes out life’ and the dynamic ‘wind-tortured’ seascapes of triumphant, glinting flowers and distant rock terraces” and that “unlike the torpid sheltered garden, the galvanizing sea garden images psychic power, mental clarity, and the battle of contraries which brings all faculties to bear” (113-114). The garden settings of the collection, that is, as representations of the poet’s imagination which inspire specific emotional reactions provide H.D. with the space in which she can attempt to re-define “beauty” in poetry; for H.D., this can only be achieved through acts of poetic violence, revealed in the images of the harsh sea garden environment and ultimately exemplified by her fragmented, broken verse.

In *Sea Garden*, images of fragile flowers and sweet fruit are incorporated into scenes where the hostile conditions of nature repeatedly ravish and forcibly remove them from their cultivated habitats—an action that reflects the poet’s desire to “find a new beauty” in a “terrible / wind-tortured place” (21). Analyzed within the context of the collection as a whole, the image of the fallen pear in “Orchard” offers a response to the question posed previously in “Sheltered Garden” in which the speaker asks, “Why not let the pears cling / to the empty branch?” (20) Her frustration with the stifling, “sheltered” garden consisting only of “border on border of scented pinks” inspires a vehement emotional outburst and she implores the wind to “break,” “scatter,” “snap,” and “fling” the flowers and fruits across the garden. She explains, “All your coaxing will only make / a bitter fruit—” and then instructs:

let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
with a russet coat.

Rather than idealizing the fruits in their perfected, protected states, the speaker prefers to leave the pears exposed to the harsh elements until they can ripen and fall on their own, allowing them to exemplify beauty through their strength. Her central claim, affirmed throughout *Sea Garden*, is that “beauty without strength, / chokes out life.”

The setting of the sea garden provides the ideal liminal space in which the poet can undertake her task to re-define beauty and to find a new mode of expression. Here,

the violent winds, ever-changing tides, and saltwater of the coast balance out the sweetness of the flowers and fruits the garden—images that exemplify the subject matter of Romantic poetry. Laity explains that

the early imagist landscapes of H.D.'s *Sea Garden* demonstrate her debt to the romantic overflowed paradise and regenerate landscape as projections of obstructed or liberated states of mind. . . . Usually oversweet, overflowed, and located in an enclosed space—a garden, bower, or glade—the romantic fallen paradise of love from Keats through the Pre-Raphaelites, decadents and early Yeats conceals a deadly trap behind its apparently safe, sensuous refuge . . . Despite its sensuous promise, the lover bower is actually sterile and blighting in its all-consuming torpor which anesthetizes its victim . . . As a metaphoric projection for mental processes, the garden signifies stasis, escapism, and psychic fragmentation rather than process, intellectual striving, and psychic unity. (113)

The emotional and environmental hostility in the sheltered gardens indicate the poet's urgency to create a new ideal of beautiful images in poetry, specifically, by violating the conventionally Romantic landscapes which she finds sterile and suffocating.

Furthermore, if the images of fruits and "scented pinks" in the torpid sheltered gardens are representative of Romantic poetry, and bees are traditionally a symbol of poets, then we can regard the "honey-seeking" bees in "Orchard" as symbols of Romantic and late Romantic poets from whom the speaker wishes to distinguish herself. These bees' preoccupation with gleaning only the sweetness of the fruit is comparable to the Romantics' "oversweet, overflowed" verse or to Yeats' "bee loud glade." The speaker highlights this comparison by refraining from simply referring to them as "bees" and by instead decorously naming them for their attraction to sweetness ("honey-seeking") and for their opulent coloring ("golden-banded"). Additionally, rather than making a bee-line

straight to the source of sweetness, the speaker watches the pear fall to the ground, pauses to pray, and finally makes an offering to the “unbeautiful,” impotent Priapus. In doing so, she implicitly underscores her differences in aesthetic values and poetic aims.

As she watches the pear fall, the speaker experiences a tense moment of apprehension in an act of vision that leaves her prostrate and crying. Her genuflection at the sight of the falling fruit highlights her total submission to the vision which will ultimately lead to the act of creation. The speaker, unlike the “honey-seeking,” is not interested in reaping the fruit for herself, but rather in giving the fruit, as an offering, to a higher power. The acts of vision and submission to divinity illuminate the necessary and sacred rites that the poet must undergo when engaging in the creative process. Thus, the progression of the speaker’s actions—“I saw,” “I fell,” “I bring”—exemplifies the poetic process that the sea garden requires of its poet-initiate, which is continually reenacted in individual poems and evidenced by the organization of the volume itself. For example, Gregory contends, as do I, that *Sea Garden* was carefully constructed and ordered and can thus be analyzed thematically by groups of poems. She refers to the opening three poems, “Sea Rose,” “The Helmsman,” and “The Shrine,” as the “initiation poems,” and argues that the progression of these poems enacts the process of creation previously described in my analysis of “Orchard.” “Sea Rose” therefore represents the initial moment of vision for its imagistic description of an aesthetic object (“I saw”); “The Helmsman,” in which the poet finally submits to the summons from the helmsman to return to the sea, “awakens desire for destined motion” (“I fell”); and “The Shrine,”

emulates a “rite of passage into the sacred place of the goddess” (“I bring”) (Gregory 142-143).

The offering of “broken” fruit in “Orchard,” moreover, epitomizes H.D.’s ideal of beauty since the images of *Sea Garden* only attain aesthetic value once they have withstood the torturous elements of the environment. Like T.S. Eliot’s Phlebas the Phoenician sailor, the images of the sea garden must undergo a “sea-change” in order to be transformed into something new, “rich and strange.” It is similarly important that the god to whom the speaker gives the fruit is hideous, for brokenness indicates submission to the process of transformation which necessarily precedes the moment of creation. Priapus’ impotence (i.e. his sexual “uselessness”) mirrors the “uselessness” of the goddess’ plundering shrine in “The Shrine” and of the aging worker-bee in “Cities,” providing important thematic and contextual links amongst these three poems—each of which also utilizes the symbol of the bee.

In part I of “The Shrine,” the speaker reveals that she has heard from sailors and “quiet men” that the goddess’ shrine on the cliff is “great, fierce, evil” for tempting men at sea with the illusion of safe harbor (7). The cliff shrine is, however, “useless” against the forces of the sea and frequently takes the lives of seafarers who seek shelter there: “when the tides swirl / your boulders cut and wreck / the staggering ships” (8). Nevertheless, in part II, the speaker admires the “splendour” of the cliff and she brings an offering of freesia to hang on its shelf. Despite the danger that the shrine poses to the speaker (and to those who accompany her), she continues her journey and, when the “tide

slackens,” she “hail[s] the shore” and sings out in praise of the “spirit between the headlands / and the further rocks” (9). Celena Kusch points out that “throughout *Sea Garden*, poems reevaluate usefulness and beauty in these anti-idyllic terms, praising the shrine precisely because it threatens, plunders, and causes ships to wreck” (55). The shrine defies its “uselessness” because it is a place that requires those who journey there to undergo the same torturous transformation that it must endure as it withstands the elements. The shrine also epitomizes beauty for its strength and ability to tolerate the terrible power of the sea and the wind.

As she places her offering of flowers on the cliff, the speaker cries out:

You are not forgot  
O plunder of lilies,  
honey is not more sweet  
than the salt stretch of your beach. (8)

The shrine that wrecks and plunders ships, which the speaker conflates with the goddess of the shrine herself, is thus analogous to the plundering bee that violates a flower in order to glean from it the essence of its being. The plundering shrine and bee then also mirror H.D.’s acts of poetic violence against the images of the flowers in *Sea Garden*. As the speaker in “Orchard” criticizes the “honey-seeking” bees for their obsession for sweetness only, the speaker in “The Shrine” expresses to the goddess her willingness to instead embrace the sweetness of the “salt stretch of your beach” and, in other words, to undergo the journey and process of transformation that the sea garden necessitates. She also importantly avers that she will not forget the goddess of the shrine, reiterating her

task as an initiate to “remember.” The speaker’s assertion that she has not forgotten the shrine or the goddess, her embrace of sweetness of the salty beach, and her commitment to continue to journey to the shrine ultimately reflects H.D.’s decision to write the poems in this volume and to follow her ascetic and daring work as a poet (Gregory 144). This desire culminates in “Cities,” in which the aged bee-poet, whose “sweet task” it is to “recall the old splendour / await the new beauty of cities,” must “wander about / find no honey of flowers in this waste” (41).

According to “The Wise Sappho,” an essay that H.D. wrote around 1920, the goddess “who watches over the sea” in “The Shrine” is likely also a reference to the woman who watches over the sea garden itself:

Sappho has become for us a name, an abstraction as well as a pseudonym for poignant human feeling, she is indeed rocks set in a blue sea, she is the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken. She is the island of artistic perfection where lover of ancient beauty (shipwrecked in the modern world) may yet find foothold and take breath and gain courage for new adventures and dream of yet unexplored continents and realms of future artistic achievements. (67)

H.D. here reveals that the entirety of the sea garden is itself the poetic incarnation of her muse, Sappho. The aged bee-poet in “Cities,” furthermore, is precisely this “lover of ancient beauty (shipwrecked in the modern world).” If Sappho is herself the “island of artistic perfection” (i.e. if she *is* the sea garden), then it logically follows that H.D. would depict herself as a bee as one way to imagine access to the environment and, therefore, to her muse. In the same way that H.D. distinguishes herself from her more contemporary artistic forebears through the image of the “honey-seeking” bees in “Orchard,” she

elsewhere designates her place in an ancient literary tradition by using this same image as it allows her to envision access (as a bee) to the aesthetic ideals of the past (via the sea flowers and sweet-bitter fruits).

Drawing on a literary tradition begun by Virgil in *Georgics*, in “Cities,” H.D. presents the image of a modern city through the visual of a beehive; here, the poet is the old worker bee who can “find no honey of flowers” in the wasteland of the new city she now inhabits. She expresses disgust for the modern city, which is overly crowded with bodies and “street after street alike,” and questions how the “maker of cities” who had previously fashioned the simple “beauty of temple” and “splendour” of ancient palaces could have created such a “hideous” new city (40). However, while she is disillusioned with her modern world, she remains hopeful that she will be able to find and extract some remnants of beauty from somewhere nearby. She reiterates her optimism in her questions, “Can we believe,” “Can we think,” and, “Is our task the less sweet?”

Echoing the speaker’s attitude in “Sheltered Garden,” in the new city-hive, beauty and life are mutually exclusive. For the bee-poet, honey is the symbol of pure beauty: it is the distilled essence of the flower which has been transported and transformed by the bee. After the “maker of cities grew faint,” however, the city had such an overabundance of honey that the citizens could no longer understand the value of neither beauty nor honey:

men could not grasp beauty,  
beauty was over them,  
through them, about them,



no crevice unpacked with the honey,  
rare, measureless.

Again reminiscent of the criticism of the “honey-seeking” bees in “Orchard,” the speaker in “Cities” is disgusted by the overcrowding of beauty (i.e. honey) into “street after street alike.” For the poet, ideal beauty is in the old “rare” cells which are now displaced by the “seething” larvae, which simply “live” and “await great events.” Not only are these larvae ubiquitous, but they are also worthless, despite the fact that it is they that repeatedly call the elder worker bees “useless” (41). In contrast to the larvae that wait to be fed the honey from the returning bees, however, the worker bee delights in the very task of finding the “honey of flowers in this waste.” Just as Virgil’s bees that “freely give their lives under their load: / so great their love of flowers and the glory of honey-making” (*Georgics* 133), the bee-poet’s wings are torn and dull with the remnants of stray pollen and “grains of honey”—and yet her task to “recall the old splendour” and to “await the new beauty” is no less sweet.

In the *Sea Garden* poems, the speaker inhabits—as the poet creates—a world that embodies Sappho; but once she returns to the modern city, the speaker herself embodies Sappho. This transformation is represented at the end of “Cities” by the bee-poet who returns to the city-hive where the spirits that crowd around her to usurp the “kiss of [her] mouth,” just as bees would surround the returning worker bee that has nectar to share with her sisters (42). The image of the poet that is here conflated with the bee with honey on its lips is one that is derived from ancient sources: “it was often believed that a wise

philosopher, eloquent speaker or inspired writer owed his outstanding ability to the fact that bees had alighted on his mouth at infancy” (Ransome 603). Sappho herself is rumored to have been blessed by the bees in this manner. At the end of “Cities,” we have been fully transported from the sea garden and into the modern city where the poet has come to the end of her rite of passage, and she imagines herself receiving a “gift” from the bee-spirits that alight on her mouth. Maintaining her optimism that her task is indeed sweet and not useless, she asserts that “the city is peopled / with spirits, not ghosts.” From the breath of these living spirits, which provides the link between the poet and all those who have come before her, she finally receives her gift of poetic expression: “*their breath was your gift, / their beauty, your life.*” Sappho’s gift thus lives on through these poems as H.D. simultaneously bestows the gift of *Sea Garden* upon her readers.

### **“Prisoners,” “Cities,” and Maeterlinck’s *The Life of the Bee***

In *HERmione*, H.D. recounts her early relationship with Ezra Pound, emphasizing the great care he took to nurture her nascent literary sensibility. As the “high-water mark of the intelligentsia,” George Lowndes exposes Hermione to the works of “Shaw, Maeterlinck, Bertrand de Born and, half-apologetic, the unexpurgated *Morte d’Arthur*,” among others (72). Hermione’s literary taste at the time is, initially, a mere reflection of George’s influence. In a scene in which Hermione visits with female companions, for example, she is questioned about what she likes to read to which she replies that she reads “Ibsen, Maeterlinck, all of Bernard Shaw” and then indicates, specifically, that she has read Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Life of the Bee* (61). In the vague exchange between

Hermione and her friend regarding this essay, she offers George's opinion rather than her own on the work: "'George said it was nature faking.' 'Did you think it was nature faking?' 'A little—it didn't quite ring true. But then the French is easy'" (61). The ambiguity of Hermione's assessment of the work, nevertheless, also speaks to the nature of the vapid conversation and its anesthetizing effect on her mind. Moments after this exchange, Hermione returns to reality "as from an anesthetic" and wonders, "Just what had she been saying? She seemed to have answered this odd girl, word for word, click, snap and click, the exact requisite counter . . ." (61) Hermione's evaluation of Maeterlinck's essay is abstruse, but I contend that H.D.'s early poetry bears ample evidence that *The Life of the Bee* was an inspirational source for her own use of the bee symbol. I focus on Maeterlinck's possible influence on two of the *Sea Garden* poems, "Prisoners" and "Cities." I shall additionally illustrate how H.D. ingeniously adapts Maeterlinck's descriptions of the bees to reflect her own creative investments.

Belgian poet, playwright, and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was a prominent contributor to the late nineteenth century art movement known as Symbolism. Reacting against realism and naturalism, symbolist writers sought to express truths indirectly through the fluidity of the symbol. Symbolism therefore presaged Imagism for its use of free verse and its focus on the symbol to evoke, rather than represent directly, the emotional state of the subject—hence Maeterlinck was such an important figure for Pound. Maeterlinck was known particularly for his Symbolist drama for which he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911. However, his essay *The Life of the Bee*,

published in 1901, was so popular that it became a bestseller. Maeterlinck was himself an avid beekeeper and, in his essay, claims to have read “almost all that has been written on bees” (5). He outlines a brief bibliography of literary and scientific writings on the bee, from the works of ancient men such as Aristotle, Varro, and Virgil who wrote about “this strange little creature” to Jan Swammerdam, a Dutch scientist who, in the seventeenth century, invented the microscope and subsequently discovered that the sex of the ruling bee was female. Though Maeterlinck’s experience as an apiarist and his extensive research give him a sufficient background to discuss the bee scientifically, he explains that his intent is rather to “speak of the bees very simply, as one speaks of a subject one knows and loves to those who know it not” (4). Personifying the bees to offer a “bee’s-eye view” of life in the hive, Maeterlinck describes how a swarm constructs its hive, or “city,” and details how each bee fulfills its specific duty over the course of one year. He combines scientific observations with poetic language and ultimately produces a philosophical narrative that draws just as much on the biological realities of the life of the bee as it does the literary conventions associated with it. The final chapter culminates with a meditation on the “progress of the race,” the “poor task” of the “humble-bee” and our own analogous “human task” which we must learn from the bees’ example.

Although H.D.’s “Prisoners” does not explicitly mention bees, the poem bears images that are strikingly reminiscent of Maeterlinck’s chapter, “The Young Queens,” in which he describes the various ways a hive can acquire its next queen. In H.D.’s poem,

the speaker and addressee are fellow prisoners and former lovers; however, the speaker is newly released from her cell and writes a letter of instructions (i.e. the poem) to her beloved. I propose to read “Prisoners” as an adaptation of Maeterlinck’s narrative of the young virgins and as an invocation of Sappho’s love poems, which also rely on the image of the bee.

In *The Life of the Bee*, Maeterlinck explains that the process of procuring a new queen involves a fatal battle between one of the “princesses”—a select group of young bees which are fed a diet of “royal jelly”—and either an established or an invading queen bee. Because the vast majority of young queens are doomed to die soon after their birth—for there can only be one queen per hive—Maeterlinck describes the cells that contain the young queens as “urns,” “tombs,” and “prisons.” When it is time, young queens may break out from the “lids of these myriad urns” and “the nurses at once come running; they help the young bee to emerge from her prison, they clean her and brush her, and at the tip of their tongue present the first honey of the new life” (65). Nevertheless, the young bee knows before she emerges from her cell that her life will be immediately threatened by the queen:

She hears the war-cry of her rival; and already aware of her royal duty and destiny, although she has not yet looked upon life, nor knows what a hive may be, she answers the challenge from within the depths of her prison. But her cry is different; it is stifled and hollow, for it has to traverse the walls of a tomb; and, when night is falling, and noises are hushed, and high over all there reigns the silence of the stars, the apiarist who nears these marvellous [sic] cities and stands, questioning, at their entrance, recognises and understands the dialogue that is passing between the wandering queen and the virgins in prison. (71)

Like the young queen bees, the lovers in “Prisoners” will face the extreme danger of a crowd as soon as they emerge from their cell. As she prepares to meet her own destiny as she exits her cell, and in order to ensure a proper farewell, the speaker bids her beloved:

Press close to the portal,  
my gate will soon clang  
and your fellow wretches  
will crowd the entrance—  
be first at the gate. (34)

In much the same way, Maeterlinck describes the altercation between the queen and the newly emergent prisoners thus:

The queens will meet on the comb; the workers will gather around and watch their combat; and when the stronger has overcome the weaker, they will then, in their ardour for work and hatred of disorder, expel the corpses, close the door on the violence of the future, forget the past, return to their cells, and resume their peaceful path to the flowers that await them. (73)

Echoing Maeterlinck’s bees who instinctively understand their “royal duty and destiny,” the speaker of “Prisoners” recognizes her ill-fated destiny which she can “read” in the architecture of the prison:

It is a strange life,  
patterned in fire and letters  
on the prison pavement.  
If I glance up  
it is written on the walls  
it is cut on the floor,  
it is patterned across  
the slope of the roof.

The speaker knows that she and her fellow prisoners live doomed existences; however, as she is released from her cell, she retains some hope that

we are not forgot  
lost in this turmoil,  
about to be crushed out,  
burned or stamped out  
at best with sudden death.

Furthermore, the speaker claims that her optimism stems from the relationship that she has with her beloved: “I am glad enough to depart / though I have never tasted life / as in these last weeks.” If we accept that the prison is a metaphor for the cells of a beehive, then the speaker’s assertion that she has “tasted life” may be an explicit reference to honey which, Maeterlinck asserts, circulates “like generous blood” through the hive (98). Moreover, the emerging young queens are presented by the nurse bees with “the first honey of the new life” (65). Finally, since honey on the lips is a traditional metaphor associated with eloquent speakers, poets, and prophets, then we can also assume that this instance of the speaker receiving the taste of life (i.e. honey) is indicative of her poetic gift, foreshadowing a similar moment at the end of “Cities.” However, with the gift of life and poetry also comes the necessity of submission to the toilsome process of initiation.

The cells of the young queens, like prison cells and like the sea garden itself, are liminal spaces that will ultimately require the subject to submit to torture and transformation. For the young queen bees, the prison cells are potentially both cradle and

tomb; the “cell-door” merely marks the boundary between certain death and almost-certain death. This perhaps explains the speaker’s hesitation to leave: “last night if the guard / had left the gate unlocked / I could not have ventured to escape” (35). The speaker, however, *is* released from her cell and is, one assumes, ushered to her impending death. Her journey past the cells of “wretches” and “desperate faces” only to face mortality is analogous to the journey of the speaker in “The Shrine” who must continue her arduous path though she must risk her life in order to undergo the process of spiritual transfiguration, for new life is only possible through death.

Although two young queens would be enemies in a beehive, H.D. modifies Maeterlinck’s the narrative to write of two lovers with a similar fortune who must abandon their love and face death. In addition to the cells of the prison, the prominent images in the poem are the hyacinth and spear-flower, indicating that the image of the bee may be connected to the figure of the beloved. As she begins her journey through the prison, the speaker experiences a moment of exalted joy as she remembers her beloved “at the banquet / each flower of your hyacinth-circlet / white against your hair.” Continuing the association between the beloved and flowers, the speaker recounts another memory:

Once you lifted a spear-flower.  
I remember how you stooped  
To gather it—  
And it flamed, the leaf and shoot  
And the threads, yellow, yellow—  
Sheer till they burnt  
To red-purple in the cup.



The transformation of the spear-flower is reflective of the sea flowers in the volume which, like the love between the prisoners, must undergo a “sea-change.” Gregory explains that, “these are extreme instances of love, yet they share the same essential code as ‘Sea Rose’—the torture and transfiguration of the soul within the suffering of elemental salt” (144).

Additionally, the “hyacinth-circlet” and the transformation of the spear-flower from yellow to red-purple is likely an invocation of Sappho. For example, Sappho writes, “A hillside hyacinth shepherds tread flat / a red bloom in the dust – it is like that” (67). Furthermore, in “The Wise Sappho,” H.D. explains that she associates colors, particularly red and purple, with Sappho’s poetry:

I think of the words of Sappho as these colours, or states rather, transcending colour yet containing (as great heat the compass of the spectrum) all colour. And perhaps the most obvious is this rose colour, merging to richer shades of scarlet, purple or Phoenician purple. (58)

Sappho is, of course, also known for her “sweet-bitter” love poems which center on the image of the bee for its connotation of the pleasurable sweetness of honey and the pain of its sting.<sup>19</sup> Bonnie MacLachlan explains that in all of Hellenistic poetry “the sweet-bitter image of the bee is a favourite *topos* for describing the pleasurable pain experienced in love” (MacLachlan 97). In “Prisoners,” H.D. is clearly drawing on this ancient tradition by using the voice of the lover “in ecstasy within the suffering of external bondage or

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<sup>19</sup> In fragment 130, Sappho writes, “Once more Love stirs me up, the limb-loosener, / a creature bitter-sweet, baffling” (21). Bonnie MacLachlan argues that the “bitter-sweet” creature is that of a bee. Similarly, fragment 107 reads, “Neither the honey nor the bee for me” (83).

necessity” (Gregory 144). Drawing on Maeterlinck’s narrative of the virgin queens while invoking Sappho’s “bitter-sweet” bee, “Prisoners,” ultimately foreshadows “Cities,” which imitates even more ostensibly Maeterlinck’s work while simultaneously conjuring the muse of *Sea Garden*.

We can trace the extended bee metaphor in H.D.’s “Cities” back to traditions begun by Aristotle and, especially, Virgil; however, the poem also explicitly echoes the language and content of *The Life of the Bee*. In his description of how the bees work together, for example, Maeterlinck asserts that, unlike in human society, the bees are not actually controlled by the queen, but rather instinctively know what duties they have been created to fulfill in order to assure that their “race” continues on. Perpetuity is the force driving the “spirit of the hive” (13) and the “god of the bees,” Maeterlinck asserts, “is the future” (20). Owing to her focus on the future, the queen bee will eventually and inexplicably leave her original hive and, taking half of the swarm with her, will seek to establish a new hive. During this procedure, Maeterlinck laments that the bees “have *forgotten the splendour and wealth of their native city*, where existence had been so admirably organised and certain, where the essence of every flower reminiscent of sunshine had enabled them to smile at the menace of winter” (38 emphasis mine). In “Cities,” the speaker finds the insistence of the “maker of cities” to create new ones, despite the organized “beauty of temple / and space before temple / arch upon perfect arch” of the original city, similarly problematic (40). Mirroring Maeterlinck’s language,

the speaker ridicules the young larvae who cannot recall the “old splendour” and whose sole focus is to ensure the future of the bee-race.

The aged worker-bee is left with the “sweet task” of remembering the past and of finding new beauty in the new city-wasteland—a task which leaves “grains of honey / old dust of stray pollen / dull on our torn wings” (41). In his meditation on why these bees submit to such a torturous existence, Maeterlinck similarly exalts the task of the worker bees:

Little city abounding in faith and mystery and hope, why do your myriad virgins consent to a task that no human slave has ever accepted? Another spring might be theirs, another summer, were they only a little less wasteful of strength, a little less self-forgetful in their ardour for toil; but at the magnificent moment when the flowers all cry to them, they seem to be stricken with the fatal ecstasy of work; and in less than five weeks they almost all perish, their wings broken, their bodies shriveled and covered with wounds. (21)

Echoing the speaker’s assertion in “The Shrine” that the plundering cliff temple is not “useless,” and reiterating the poet’s modified definition of the idea of utility, the battered worker bee in “Cities” embodies the necessity of self-annihilation and submission to one’s calling despite the inability to know the purpose or the end result, but rather simply to delight in the journey or the task itself. Here, H.D. again draws on Maeterlinck who says,

Let not the possibility of general annihilation blur our perception of the task before us; above all, let us not count on the miraculous aid of chance . . . It is open to us, if we choose, to await the better or worst that may follow some alien accident, but on condition that such expectation shall not hinder our human task. Here again do the bees, as Nature always, provide a most excellent lesson. (114)

Although the bee can “find no honey of flowers in this waste,” she will continue to “wander about” and “await the new beauty of cities.” The bee’s task ultimately parallels H.D.’s poetic aim in *Sea Garden*—one which she repeatedly metaphorically enacts throughout the collection as she poetically plunders the sea flowers and the fruits in the gardens.

H.D.’s poetry is what Maeterlinck refers to as human “cerebral substance,” which is analogous to the honey that bees are instinctively inclined to make; through the creation and progression of *Sea Garden*, furthermore, H.D. enacts the advice that Maeterlinck gleans from his observation of the bees:

And just as it is written in the tongue, the stomach, and mouth of the bee that it must make honey, so it is written in our eyes, our ears, our nerves, our marrow, in every lobe of our head, that we must make cerebral substance; nor is there need that we should divine the purpose this substance shall serve. The bees know not whether they will eat the honey they harvest, as we know not who it is shall reap the profit of the cerebral substance we shall have formed, or of the intelligent fluid that issues therefrom and spreads over the universe, perishing when our life ceases or persisting after our death. As they go from flower to flower collecting more honey than themselves and their offspring can need, let us go from reality to reality seeking food for the incomprehensible flame, and thus, certain of having fulfilled our organic duty, preparing ourselves for whatever befall . . . Time then will come when all things will turn so naturally to good in a spirit that has given itself to the loyal desire of this simple human duty, that the very suspicion of the possible aimlessness of its exhausting effort will only render the duty the clearer, will only add more purity, power, disinterestedness, and free to the ardour wherewith it still seeks. (115)

Like H.D., Maeterlinck anticipates the criticism of the “aimlessness” or “uselessness” of self-annihilation in the name of pursuing the “incomprehensible flame” and producing

“cerebral substance.” H.D. would continue to take issue with the notion that poetry and art was a useless pastime—especially during an age of war—for the entirety of her career. She addresses this topic particularly in *Trilogy* in which she draws on the meanings and mythological figures associated with the bee symbol to demonstrate how the ancient history stored in language can help to mend war-fractured consciousness through poetry, thus validating the necessity of poets in a time of war.

CHAPTER IV  
THE BEE IN H.D.'S LATER WORK

Although the three poems comprising H.D.'s war epic, *Trilogy*, were conceived of together, they were initially published separately and only later combined and printed under a single title in 1973. In *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946), H.D. offers a spiritual response to war as she attempts to make sense of the ruins of war-ravaged London which was devastated during the bombings of World War II. Susan Stanford Friedman describes *Trilogy* as a “portrait of the modernist nightmare” and as “a kind of primer of poetic mythmaking” because of the way in which H.D. seamlessly blends world religions and cosmologies (*Psyche Reborn* 209). By collapsing Egyptian, Greek, and Christian deities, the poet emphasizes the possibility of healing and resurrecting society as a whole, primarily through the reclamation and fusion of such female figures as Venus, Aphrodite, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and especially, Mary Magdalene—a feat only made possible through the poetic process of syncretic mythmaking and etymological distillation.

Reminiscent of *Sea Garden*'s bee-poet-initiate and her task to recall “old splendour” and “await the new beauty of cities,” in *Trilogy*, the poet's task is “to recover old truths and synthesize new ones” (*Psyche Reborn* 209). For H.D., resurrection of

humanity is only made possible by going back to the beginning of history—that is, to “the Word”—for one must know the past in order to mend the future. In *The Flowering of the Rod*, the poet defines resurrection as a “sense of direction”: “a bee-line, / straight to the horde and plunder” (583). This fascinatingly enigmatic statement is illuminated when we consider the multi-faceted resonances of the bee symbol across Egyptian, Greek, and Christian cultures and belief systems. Like “the Word” and the poet, bees were believed cross-culturally to be transcendental beings originating in the beginning of time. In addition to being synonymous with poets and prophets, the bee was a symbol of resurrection and fresh incarnation since the time of ancient Egyptian civilization. Thus, the bee and its byproduct, which appear throughout the *Trilogy* poems, are not only symbolic of the poet herself but are also reflective of the work’s theme of resurrection and re-birth.

In this chapter, I begin by briefly outlining the early twentieth-century history of the bee symbol in ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology. In addition to the scholarship of Hilda Ransome published in 1937, I rely heavily on the research of two scholars who were H.D.’s contemporaries and members were part of the Cambridge Ritualists, Jane Ellen Harrison and A.B. Cook. H.D. was likely familiar with these scholars’ work owing to her involvement in translation projects and her interest in world literature, a popular trend in London literary circles of the day. After tracing the connotations and mythological figures associated with the bee in these cultures and mythologies, I will discuss the ways in which H.D. both explicitly and implicitly utilizes the symbol

throughout *Trilogy* and finally, explain how it functions as a reflection of her visionary creative endeavors.

### **The Bee in Egyptian and Greek Mythology**

H.D.'s education, works of poetry, prose, and translation, and her extensive world travels evidence that she was not only interested in, but also extremely knowledgeable about, both Egyptian and Greek mythology. In *The Gift*, H.D. reveals that as a child she was read Greek myths on a nightly basis, perhaps sparking her lifelong enchantment with Greek culture and literature. Although she left college early due to ill health and failing grades, her studies in Greek literature at Bryn Mawr provided her with a solid foundation for her work as a translator and with the inspiration to write her own poetry. Nearly all of H.D.'s poetry reflects her indebtedness to her studies in and fascination with Greek Classicism, from her earliest volume, *Sea Garden*, to her latest epic, *Helen in Egypt*. Two years after she first arrived in London with Frances Gregg, in 1913, H.D. married Richard Aldington, a fellow poet whom she met through Ezra Pound. In 1915, Aldington and H.D. launched the Poets' Translation Series, a project consisting of pamphlets of translations of lesser-known works of Greek and Latin literature.<sup>20</sup> By 1919, however, H.D. had separated from Aldington, lost her father and brother, and nearly died giving birth to her daughter, Perdita. Traumatized by her personal tragedies and the events of World War I in general, H.D. was recovering from a nervous breakdown when, in 1920,

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<sup>20</sup> In total, H.D. produced three original translations in her lifetime including: *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis* (1916), *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis and the Hippolytus of Euripides* (1919), and *Euripides' Ion* (1937). She also published a play, *Hippolytus Temporizes* (1927), inspired by Euripides' dramatic composition.



she traveled to Greece with Perdita and Bryher.<sup>21</sup> In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. describes Greece as the place “spiritually of my predilection, geographically of my dreams” and, especially at the time of her mental breakdown in 1920, it represented for her “a new world, a new life” (59-60). H.D. and Bryher traveled extensively and would return to Greece in 1932 to visit Delphi for the first time. However, preceding this second trip to Greece, the two women traveled with H.D.’s mother to Egypt in 1923 and explored ancient monuments in Luxor, Karnak, and Cairo. On one occasion, they even witnessed objects being removed from King Tutankhamun’s tomb (Silverstein 38). H.D. was fascinated with Egypt and regarded it as a symbol of the sacred past; in *Notes on Thought and Vision* she describes the country, “in the terms of world-consciousness,” as the very “act of love” (37). Her dedication in *The Walls Do Not Fall* which states, “To Bryher for *Karnak 1923*,” bears evidence of the importance of her experiences in Egypt. The references to the “Luxor bee” in *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*, moreover, suggest that this was a hieroglyph that H.D. actually saw during her 1923 trip to Egypt with Bryher.

The history of the bee in ancient cultures was also a common area of study for early twentieth century scholars. A group of classical scholars studying primitive cultures, known as the Cambridge Ritualists, were interested in the idea that myths originated from ritualistic acts. Among these scholars were Jane Harrison and A.B. Cook, who specifically addressed the symbol of the bee and honey in Greek myth and

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<sup>21</sup> Bryher, or Winifred Ellerman, was a novelist with whom H.D. would share a brief intense and intimate relationship, and who would ultimately prove to be H.D.’s most important lifelong companion. Bryher was a surrogate to H.D.’s daughter and she eventually legally adopted Perdita, with her then-husband Kenneth MacPherson, in 1928.

rituals in their work. The history of the bee, however, extends far beyond its Greek roots. The pervasiveness of beekeeping, the elevated status of the bee as a symbol, and the multifarious uses of honey and wax in sacred rituals in ancient Egypt established the customs and beliefs that would become significant later in Greek culture and religion.

Hilda Ransome, whose seminal work remains highly-regarded among scholars of bees today, asserts that as early as 3500 BCE, the bee was a symbol for the king of Lower Egypt (24). This bee hieroglyph, noted on inscriptions from the time of the First Dynasty until the Roman period, was a well-known symbol for royalty for nearly four thousand years. Eva Crane also notes the prevalence of this particular stylized bee hieroglyph on tombs, statues, and wall paintings (455). Ransome includes several examples of other type of bee hieroglyphs in Egyptian writing, indicating the sundry functions of beekeeping and honey in the everyday lives of citizens. She asserts that

Beekeeping must have been practiced on a large scale in ancient Egypt, for honey was required by all classes. It was used in every household as a sweetening material; there is a marriage contract in existence which states: 'I take thee to wife . . . and promise to deliver to thee yearly twelve jars of honey.' (28)

Taxes in the form of honey were even collected by Pharaohs because the sweet substance was required for most religious rites and festivals. For example, in addition to the honey required in marriage vows and during death rites, beeswax was frequently used in the mummification process, and corpses were sometimes preserved in honey (Ransome 29). In the temple of Amen-Ra at Thebes, moreover, Ransome describes how images made from beeswax played a prominent role in daily services (29).

Because of its vast presence in religious rites, the bee was not only a royal symbol, but also a signifier of the divine. This is made clearer by the fact that the bee was associated with the sun god Ra, creator of the world. The Salt Magical Papyrus recounts the origin of bees: “When Ra weeps again the water which flows from his eyes upon the ground turns into working bees. They work in flowers and trees of every kind and wax and honey come into being” (cited in Ransome 33). Ransome explains that

The Sun-god Ra was in the creation myths of the Egyptians the framer of the earth and sea, and the god who caused the Nile flood. His right eye was the sun, his left the moon, and when he opened his eyes there was light. In [the Salt Magical Papyrus and the Kher-heb] bees and their products, honey and wax, are said to have come from *water*, which there is good reason for believing the Egyptians regarded as one of the principal sources of life, one of the ‘Givers of Life.’ (33)

The bees, having come directly from the tears of Ra—the original source of life—in turn also become creators of life. Humans were also believed to have been born from the tears of Ra, perhaps explaining why the soul was thought to take the form of a bee after death:

In the Kher-heb, the officiating priest says, ‘*Going about as a bee, thou seest all the goings about of thy father.*’ There is an ancient belief, found in many parts of the world, that *souls* take the form of bees, and it is just as possible that this text may contain the germ of this belief. The Egyptians believed that a man possessed a *ka* or double, who had to be fed after death, and this *going about like a bee* may refer to this *ka*. (31)

In another sacred text, the “Book of Am-Tuat [the Underworld],” the voice of the soul is compared to the hum of bees (32). Ransome notes that honey and honey-cakes were

frequently offered to the dead since it was believed that the soul required food and drink beyond death (30). It naturally follows that if one's soul, or *ka*, takes the form of a bee, one should be fed sacramental honey in the afterlife. From these ancient texts it is clear that bees have been sacred symbols representing life-giving forces and the possibility of life after death since the time of the Egyptians.

E. Readicker-Henderson notes that beekeeping did not become prominent in Greece until around 600 BCE (26). Nevertheless, similar symbolic associations with the bee remained intact as beekeeping began to flourish in Greek society: as in ancient Egyptian culture, the bee was associated with the gods; its products were used in countless sacred rituals; and it was “closely associated with the birth and death of the soul” (Cook 23). It was also during this time that bees came to be known as symbols of eloquent speakers and visionaries. In 1895, A.B. Cook published an article entitled “The Bee in Greek Mythology,” in which he states that the purpose for his research was inspired by the British Museum's and Berlin Museum's recent acquisition of several new artifacts featuring bees.<sup>22</sup> Cook discusses the symbolic importance of the bee in ancient and contemporary Greek culture, and recounts the relationship between renowned gods and bees, including Zeus, Hermes, Dionysus, and Aphrodite. Additionally, he details how Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, and Demeter were known to have had bee-priestesses; these flesh-abstaining nymphs could prophesy only when fed honey. In her *Prolegomena*

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<sup>22</sup> Among the artifacts, Cook lists the following items specifically: “Gold ornament of a bee,” “sundry small plates of gold from the Crimea representing a head of Dionysus, *Bees*, and a Gorgoneion,” “fourteen bodies of bees in gold of late Etruscan workmanship,” “a bee stamped in gold leaf of the same date,” “three hundred golden bees found along an ox-head of gold in the tomb of Childeric, king of the Franks” (1).

to the *Study of Greek Religion* (1908), Jane Harrison argues that in order to understand Greek religion, one must first examine the rituals underlying the belief system. She therefore focuses on the role of honey in sacred rituals, and also discusses the bee-priestesses associated with Dionysus, Hermes, Zeus, and Aphrodite.

As an infant, Zeus was fed and nursed by sacred bee-nymphs in a cave where his mother hid him from his father, Cronus, on the island of Crete. Cook asserts that Zeus' connection with bees was so prominent that the bee was his emblem on the currency in some Cretan cities (3). Ransome further notes that one of the names for Zeus was "Melissaios" or the "Bee-man" (96). One of Zeus' children was similarly anointed with a bee-title, "Meliteus," who went on to become a hero and found a town called "*Melita*, the honey-town" (96). Other notable goddesses, along with their priestesses, were also known and named for their association with bees:

Porphyry says that the priestesses of Demeter, as initiated into the mysteries of the Earth-goddess, were called by the Ancients 'Bees' (Melissae), that Persephone herself was named by them *Melitodes* (honeyed), and that the Moon (Selene, afterwards identified with Artemis) was called by them a Bee. Calimachus mentions that the priestesses of Demeter were called Melissae. (96)

In addition to Artemis, goddess of the moon and hunting, and Demeter, the Earth-mother and goddess of fertility, who each had devotees called "Melissae," Aphrodite was also known as "Melissa" or "Queen Bee," and the priestesses at the temple of Aphrodite at

Eryx were likewise called “Melissae.”<sup>23</sup> Bees belong to the order *hymenoptera*, meaning “veil-winged,” evoking the veil, or “hymen,” that conceals the innermost shrine of a goddess’ temple. Representative of love, marriage, earth, and fertility, it is logical that these goddesses would be associated with the bee—the creature that is responsible for fertilizing plants and sustaining the planet’s flora and fauna. Furthermore, Baring and Cashford point out Aphrodite’s prophetic abilities via her association with the bee:

One way in which the Greeks understood . . . death-in-the-midst-of-life was through the image of Aphrodite in the guise of a bee, inherited from the bee goddesses dancing on the golden seals in Crete, and linked to prophecy and knowledge of a hidden destiny as teachers of Apollo. Golden Aphrodite brings the honey of life to all she touches; she renders the person, the occasion, luminous, incandescent, she gives it the blessing of timelessness, but she is not bound to stay. (356)

Although numerous “bee-maidens,” or priestesses, were devoted to several different gods or goddesses throughout Greek mythology, one of the most distinguished versions of a bee-priestess is Apollo’s chief oracular priestess at Delphi, the Pythian prophetess, or the “Delphic Bee” (Baring and Cashford 119; Haarhoff 155; Ransome 97). Susan Scheinburg notes, in fact, that the second temple of Apollo at Delphi was rumored to have actually been constructed by bees and birds out of wax and feathers (20). It is for this reason, Cook asserts, that that the temple was devoted to the “joint worship of bees and birds” (5). The tombs of Mycenae and the omphalos stone, which was

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<sup>23</sup> In an otherwise inconsequential letter written to Norman Holmes Pearson on May 27, 1947, H.D. indicates that she was conscious of the connection between the word “Melissa” and “bee”: “I am going now again to MELISA (a bee?) to see about the Italian Eliot and the first O’Neil you asked for” (*Between History and Poetry* 74).

believed to be seated at the “navel of the earth” in the temple at Delphi, are even shaped like traditional bee-skeps (Baring and Cashford 119, Cook 5). In literature, moreover, bees were frequently referred to as the “birds of the Muses” (Ransome 104). The close association between birds and bees is especially relevant to H.D.’s *Trilogy*, her assertion that “resurrection is a sense of direction,” and the juxtaposition of the birds circling to “remember” with the “bee-line” to resurrection.

In the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Apollo, the sun god and god of music and poetry, gives to the messenger god, Hermes, a gift of the “bee maidens,” three sisters who must become intoxicated with honey in order to prophesy. It is from these bee maidens that Hermes too learns the gift of prophecy. With his winged-sandals and his prophetic abilities, Hermes is almost bee-like himself—which perhaps explains why H.D. would choose him as her patron (Friedman 207). As “the god who alone could lead the souls of the dead out of life and sometimes back again,” Hermes is the Greek version of the Egyptian god, Osiris, who ushered spirits between life and death (Baring and Cashford 120). Hattie Ellis remarks that, in fact, it is

Hardly surprising . . . that bees came to be portrayed as special creatures that could move between life and death, between the world and the underworld, between humans and the divine. In ancient Greece, bees flying through the cracks of rocks were thought to be souls emerging from the underworld, just as the ancient Egyptians believed the insects to be human spirits that could fly anywhere. (65)

In *Trilogy*, H.D. also associates Hermes with Thoth, the Egyptian scribe god that invented writing and who is often depicted with a papyrus. As a messenger with poetic

and prophetic abilities, Hermes is representative of the poet's role as an intermediary figure and whose duty it is to preserve the past in her poetry and lead others to the future.

Similar to the ancient Egyptians' belief that bees were born from the tears of Ra, the Greeks believed that bees could be born from the carcass of an ox and actually embodied the soul of that animal. Ovid tells the story of Aristaeus (who would later become Virgil's protagonist in his bee epic, the *Georgics*) who wept because all of his bees had died. He seeks the help of Proteus who tells him that in order to obtain more bees, he must bury the body of a slaughtered ox and, once the carcass decayed enough, swarms of bees would emerge. The belief in the ox-born bee actually persisted all the way through the Middle Ages (Ransome 112). Although Greek writers were the first to mention the idea that the life of an ox could be passed on in the form of a bee, Ransome notes that the belief may be much older. She contends that the myth may in fact originate in ancient Egypt where the sacred bull, or Apis, was worshipped above any other animal because it was said to embody the soul of Osiris, the god of resurrection. The ancient Egyptians, as ardent believers in the afterlife, also believed that animals could be generated from the corpses of other animals (Ransome 117). The scientific name of the honey bee, *Apis Mellifica*, furthermore bears convincing evidence of the long-standing connection between Egyptian Apis bull and the bee. Ransome also notes that in Greek myth, Dionysus could take the form of a bull and that when he was torn into pieces as a bull, he then regenerated as a bee (116). The belief in the ox-born, or bull-begotten, bee and the idea that one's soul could take the form of a bee after death—two ideas deeply



embedded in Egyptian and Greek myth—ultimately reflect an ancient and sacred belief in the possibility of resurrection and the regeneration of the soul.

**“Resurrection is a bee-line”: Bees, Honey, and Myrrh in *Trilogy***

Through the dedications and dates which either precede or conclude each of the three sections of *Trilogy*, H.D. connects her personal memories to the collective historical moment. The first section, dated 1942, opens with the mention of “an incident here or there,” referring to the London bombings which resulted in the “rails gone (for guns) / in your (and my) old town square” (509). H.D.’s survival of the London Blitz provides her the impetus to open, metaphorically, the walls of the past and of her mind. As she contemplates the destruction of her town square, she imagines ancient hieroglyphs, the “Luxor bee, chick and hare,” which “pursue unalterable purpose” and continue to “prophesy from the stone papyrus.” The vision of these symbols allows the speaker to see the parallel between the modern and the ancient ruins: “there, as here, ruin opens . . . there, as here, there are no doors.” As she walks through the town and assesses the structural damage, the speaker invokes Samuel, a Biblical prophet, and the Pythian prophetess, or Delphic Bee; she passes through doorways and destroyed walls, akin to the walls of her mind that lead her to knowledge of the past, and she is overcome with the “Spirit” of the prophets: “shivering overtakes us, / as of old” (510). In accordance with the ancient belief that prophets foretell the future while poets provide information about the forgotten past, the speaker aligns herself with the hieroglyphs of the creatures dedicated to a task and to the Biblical and Greek prophets, and realizes that her own

“unalterable purpose” is to mediate the ancient secrets stored in language and heal war-fractured consciousness. Fighting the notion that “poets are useless” (517), the living poet-prophet’s duty is ultimately to look “to the past to see what will happen in the future,” since “history is not a progression; it is a ‘processus’ of re-created essences” (*Psyche* 112).

The poet, a kind of spiritual servant in a secular, war-torn world, asserts that it is vital that the collective “we”—that is, she and the other unnamed initiates in the poem—“re-dedicate our gifts / to spiritual realism” (537) and “recover old values” (511). Reciting passages from the Bible, she reiterates that “*in the beginning was the Word,*” and states that the “Word” predates the “Sword” (519). That is, the very idea of war (i.e. the “Sword”) depends upon language (i.e. the “Word”) for its reification. Like “the Word,” she affirms, “We [poets] go back to the beginning”:

we are the keepers of the secret,  
the carriers, the spinners  
  
of the rare intangible thread  
that binds all humanity  
  
to ancient wisdom  
to antiquity . . . (522)

As initiates and as “living remnants” of the past, poets are the only beings capable of “remembering” ancient knowledge and rectifying the wrongdoings of war. One of the ancient secrets to which the poet is privy is that “gods always face two-ways” (511), allowing her to understand the “historical parallels” and “psychic affinities” among

disparate belief systems (539). In uncovering these parallels in her poetry, through the process of religious syncretism and word alchemy, the poet can provide healing to the “chasm, schism in consciousness” (538). She therefore bids her fellow initiates to “recover the Sceptre, / the rod of power”:

it is Caduceus; among the dying  
it bears healing:

or evoking the dead,  
it brings life to the living. (512)

The “rod of power,” symbolic of the poet’s pen, can perform two functions which represent the poetic aim of *Trilogy*: the sceptre can, like Hermes’ Caduceus, provide healing, or it can “bring life to the living” and resurrect the dead.

In her first attempt to “correlate faith to faith” (541) through a process of linguistic distillation, the speaker attempts to “disentangle” the “Christos-image,” which then becomes “Lord *Amen*” and then “Amen-Ra” and finally, “*Amen, Aries, the Ram*” (525-527). Ra and Christ are figures that are both associated with bees and honey, and are symbols of fresh incarnation and resurrection. The connection between Christ and the bee symbol from H.D.’s childhood religion is explicit in *The Walls Do Not Fall*. She describes the “Christos-image” as depicted in Velazquez’s painting, *Christ Crucified*, emphasizing Christ’s “amber” eyes which are “clear with amber / shining” (524) and “amber and they are on fire” (525). Christ’s amber-colored eyes are recalled when the speaker asserts, “we would feed forever / on the amber honey-comb / of your

remembered greeting,” directly echoing the Moravian hymns that H.D. would have sang as a child which praise the healing and redemptive power of the resurrected Christ’s blood. Christ, the son of God who died and rose again, is conflated with Ra, the sun god who is reborn every day. In addition to producing bees from his tears during the initial act of creation, Ra himself was born in the form of a calf. It is told that each day, by midday, he was the size of a full-grown bull and by evening, he died in order to be reborn the next day with the sun (Ions 36). The speaker acknowledges this aspect of Ra, “the sun-disk / the re-born Sun” (527). She later practices her verbal alchemy on another male deity, Osiris, which “equates O-sir-is or O-sire-is / Osiris, the star Sirius” (540). Osiris, the Egyptian god who too was resurrected after his murder, is also connected to the image of the bull, or Apis. The bull, whose soul was believed to take the form of a bee for thousands of years, is yet another symbol of renewal and regeneration related to Ra, Osiris, and the bee.

The distilling of the deities’ names leads the poet back to the names of stars; Osiris, for example, becomes Sirius. In *Tribute to the Angels*, Mary becomes “Star of the Sea” and “Venus” becomes “Aphrodite” and then “Astarte,” “star of the east / star of the west” (553). She then equates each star with jeweled boxes of fragrance and incense which she equates to the “healers, helpers / of the One” (529). In Section 26 of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, however, the speaker asks, “What fruit is our store, / what flower? . . . what particular healing-of-the nations / is our leaf?” (530) Ultimately, through the process of fusing splintered identities in the act of verbal alchemy, the poet produces images of

gems and fragrances that she continually tries to describe and name in her attempt to answer this question. The answer is only finally given, however, by distilling the names of female deities, symbols of the original mother; furthermore, it is only revealed in the final image in *The Flowering of the Rod* in the contents of the alabaster jar.

At the end of the first section of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the speaker says, “we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? what for?” (511) The passing of the flame has a dual significance: it at once refers to the survival of the bombings as well as to the flame of initiation. The speaker is thus faced with her purpose for living and for writing. As part of the

nameless initiates,  
born of one mother,  
  
companions  
of the flame (521)

her ultimate task is to reclaim the “original great-mother” figure (536). The “one mother” is imagined through the fusion of the figures of Isis, Aphrodite/Venus, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene, all of whom together personify “Love, the Creator” (536). Through the process of etymological distillation, the poet attempts to reclaim these women—many of whom have been historically deemed as “retrogressive” and as “harlots” (511)—and to retrieve from the resulting image the essences of healing and resurrection.

In the opening section of *Tribute to the Angels*, the poet invokes Hermes, “patron of alchemists,” and directs him to “steal then, O orator / plunder, O poet,”

of your fire and breath,  
melt down and integrate,

re-invoke, re-create  
opal, onyx, obsidian (547-548)

Hermes, who learned the gift of prophecy from the three bee-maidens given to him by Apollo, is the poet’s patron. The use of the word “plunder” here, juxtaposed with the word “poet,” additionally evokes Hermes’ association with the bee. The “plundering” bee also featured in the *Sea Garden* poem, “The Shrine” in which the speaker asserts, “You are not forgot, / O plunder of lilies” (8). In “The Shrine,” the poet addresses “she who watches over the sea,” the enigmatic figure assumed to either be Aphrodite or Sappho, or both. In *Tribute to the Angels*, Aphrodite, the Greek version of Venus, is similarly associated the lily-plundering bee. In her attempt to re-claim the figure of Venus, whose name traditionally connotes “impurity,” “venereous,” and “lascivious” (553), the poet etymologically elevates Venus to mean “venerate, / venerator” (554). She later relates Venus to Venice and the bell-tower which rings out the names of God’s seven angels. As the campanili clatter, the speaker says that

it seems the whole city (Venus-Venice)  
will be covered with gold pollen shaken

from the bell-towers, lilies plundered  
with the weight of massive bees . . . (556)

The image is ripe with sexuality and fertility, although it retains strong sacred overtones. The image of Venus, goddess of love and fertility, along with the pollenating, plundering bees are suggestive of the idea of birth and the renewal of life. However, the presence of the angels and the traditional Christian association of bees with the purest of souls also speak to the sacredness of this act, and ultimately presage the final image of *The Flowering of the Rod* which features a revision of the birth of Christ.

It is from Hermes that the poet learns to “melt” and “integrate” words which become images of fragranced gems. In her attempt to reclaim the “original great-mother,” each of the female figures of the poems ultimately becomes distilled into a composite version of Mary. When “Mary” is first placed in the poet’s “crucible” and distilled, the word becomes

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

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

and as she continues the process,

still *marah-mar*  
are melted, fuse and join

and change and alter,  
mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary,

Star of the Sea,  
Mother. (552)

The final product of the distillation is the “bitter, bitter jewel / in the heart of the bowl,” a precise color and fragrance that the poet cannot yet accurately describe or name (552). However, in *The Flowering of the Rod*, “Mary” undergoes a further distillation and becomes “Mary-myrrh” who weeps bitterly (591). Mary-myrrh is a combination of Mary Magdalene and of Myrrah, a mother figure from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* who was turned into a tree after having “borne a son in unhallowed fashion.” However, the association between Mary and the substance “myrrh” is essential to the theme of the *Trilogy*. It is one of the substances that binds the Virgin Mary to Mary Magdalene: it is the bundle of myrrh that replaces the Christ child in Mary’s arms in the final image of the poem and it is the gift that Mary Magdalene brings to the birth. In addition to Mary-myrrh, formed from Mary Magdalene and Myrrah, there is also the Virgin Mary who also appears as a version “the Lady” in the poet’s vision in *Tribute to the Angels*. Mary’s traditional attribute is the lily, symbolic of the resurrection, and garden pinks. The Lady’s attribute, however, is the book with unwritten pages which “will reveal / a tale of a Fisherman, / a tale of a jar or jars” (571). The speaker here foreshadows the story of *The Flowering of the Rod*, of the jars and the birth and resurrection of Mary(s).

At the beginning of the final poem of the *Trilogy*, the poet is preparing to “mount higher / to love—resurrection” (578). She has overcome and accepted the trauma of the destruction of war and now submits to death in order to receive a new life. Resurrection, she asserts, “is a sense of direction,”



resurrection is a bee-line,  
straight to the horde and plunder,  
the treasure, the store-room,  
the honeycomb;  
resurrection is remuneration,  
food, shelter, fragrance  
of myrrh and balm (583)

Here H.D. again draws on her Moravian religion, in which the honeycomb is symbolic of the wounds of Christ; it is from these wounds that the Christian bee-souls receive their remuneration and redemption. Furthermore, the “sense of direction” evokes the idea that resurrection is instinctual, like the migration of birds or a bee returning to the hive for honey, but that it also requires returning to the past before moving ahead to the future. Having submitted to the process of resurrection, the speaker identifies with the bees and says,

I am the first or the last  
of a flock or a swarm  
I am *full of new wine*;  
I am branded with a word,  
I am burnt with wood . . .  
I have gone forward,  
I have gone backward,  
I have gone onward from bronze and iron,  
into the Golden Age. (583-584)

Playing on the metaphor of alchemy and on types of metal used for war machines while referring to time periods, she communicates that she has done her “worm cycle” by exploring the past; she is now ready to emerge again as something new, like Psyche, “the butterfly, / out of the cocoon” (570). Friedman argues, moreover, that the Golden Age is not actually a time period, but “a dimension of the mind. Exploring vision, dream, art, and myth, she ‘remembers’ what the modern materialist world has ‘forgot’” (*Psyche* 115).

The speaker again invokes the Pythian Pythoness whose prophecies are “not tragedy” but rather inevitable. The Delphic Bee’s prophecies are, moreover, “simple reckoning, algebraic,” “geometry on the wing,” and they are “like a lily / folded into a pyramid” (585):

it is a lily, if you will,  
each petal,  
a kingdom, an aeon,

and it is the seed of a lily,  
that having flowered

will flower again . . .

it is that flowering balm,

it is heal-all,  
everlasting (585)

Fusing the Christian emblem of the lily with the Egyptian emblem of the pyramid as symbols for the Delphic Bee’s prophecies, the speaker reveals the essential connection

between the lily and its “flowering balm” (i.e. honey), and the idea of resurrection and healing. This image returns when Kaspar, the scribe and Mage, sees an opening flower in the jewel that Mary Magdalene wears.

Following the prophecy of the Delphic Bee is the story of how Mary acquires the alabaster jar from Kaspar and her arrival to the birth scene. In his vision of Mary, Kaspar sees her with jewels in her hair—she possesses, I contend, the alchemical distillation of all of the women who preceded her. However, in one of the jewels, Kaspar sees “the speck, fleck, grain or seed / opened like a flower” (601). In the center of the flower, he is able to see, like the circling geese, the “lost-centre island, Atlantis” and “Paradise, / before Eve” (602). These represent the “memory that connects us / with the drowned cities of pre-history” which allows Kaspar (and the poet) to reclaim Paradise through the original mother, Eve, and even “*Lilith born before Eve*” (603). The name Lilith, of course, recalls the lily and another mother figure, Mary the virgin.

In *The Walls do Not Fall* the speaker wonders which individual fragrance or substance will heal society. In *Tribute to the Angels*, she performs etymological alchemy, fusing names and figures together until the words themselves become fragranced jewels; however, the speaker does not know how to label the gems. The contents of the alabaster jar and the bundle of myrrh in Mary’s hands at the end of *The Flowering of the Rod* ultimately answer the speaker’s original question, and are reflective of her assertion that resurrection “is a bee-line” and the “fragrance / of myrrh and balm” (583). In the final image of the poem, in which both Marys are fused into one person, Mary smells the

fragrance of “all flowering things together,” thus indicating that this is the scene of resurrection. The “balm” is the “heal-all, everlasting” which comes from the lily—the Virgin—which was plundered by Venus, the personification of Love, the Creator, and her bees. The myrrh is the gift given by Mary Magdalene, Mary-myrrh, and it also takes the place of the Christ child in Mary’s arms. Since Mary is both Mary and myrrh, we can assume that Mary has, in essence, given birth to herself. Nevertheless, the poet has also previously identified with the Mary figures when asserting, “I am Mary . . . I shall be Mary-myrrh” (590). As Mary and as the myrrh, it is clear that through the process of writing *Trilogy*, the poet has found healing, imagined through the fragrance of the honey-balm, and she has experienced a spiritual rebirth, imagined through the fragrance of the myrrh. Effectively linking the past to the present and the individual to the universal, she has also provided a bridge for the “chasm of consciousness”—her own and that of humanity—by reclaiming the figure of the “all-mother” and ultimately, by reclaiming herself.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSION

H.D. must have been keenly aware of the bee symbol since childhood, owing to her upbringing in the Moravian Church which emphasized the symbolic value of the bee and its byproducts in hymns and during services, and since her great-grandfather was a beekeeper. Because of its prevalence in both Egyptian and Greek mythology and architecture, she very likely later encountered the symbol of the bee in her own studies and travels as well—and perhaps even viewed it as another link between her childhood religion and those of the most ancient civilizations. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, H.D.’s use of the image of the bee in her novels provides a key for how to interpret the imagery in her poetry. In *HERmione*, it is representative of what Hermione hopes she will one day become—a poet—a vision that H.D. fulfilled magnificently. In her earliest poetry, the bee represents the poet’s “sweet task” as a distiller of language to remind the world of ancient beauty, wisdom, and knowledge. In *The Gift*, she reveals her familial and religious connection to the symbol, and clearly associates it with her visionary gift. The bee represents the epitome of a maternal and sororal image which helped H.D. to imagine the reclamation of her poetic heritage from her familial and literary ancestors in both *The Gift* and *Trilogy*. Like the honeybee, the initiates in *Trilogy* are “born / of one

mother” whom the poet must reclaim in order to heal both herself and the world at war. In her memoir, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, which chronicles her 1946 breakdown and recovery and her work in psychic mysticism, H.D. talks about her six-month stay at Küssnacht Klinik and states, “I didn’t stay long in the bee-hive. I got well there” (110). This assessment unambiguously confirms that H.D. associated the beehive with healing, inner reflection, and spiritual renewal—a connection also made clear by her use of the bee symbol in *Trilogy*.

Harriet Monroe once said of H.D., “The astonishing thing about H.D.’s poetry is the wildness of it . . . she is, quite unconsciously, a lithe, hard, bright-winged spirit of nature to whom humanity is but an incident.” Monroe was likely referring to H.D.’s nickname, “Dryad,” originally bestowed upon her by Ezra Pound; however, the sentiment and description quite interestingly echoes Plato’s portrayal of the poet as a “light and winged and holy thing.” I would argue that H.D. perfectly fits both Monroe’s and Plato’s description of a bee-poet. And the bee symbol, which has played a significant part in human religion and culture since before the time of the ancient Egyptians, was an essential one for H.D. as a poet-prophet—for it was deeply personal, but also ancient and universal, and it helped her to achieve her visionary and creative endeavors throughout the course of her career.

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