

**Mary-ing Isis and Mary Magdalene
in “The Flowering of the Rod”:
Revisoning and Healing Through Female-Centered Spirituality in H.D.’s Trilogy**

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The palimpsest, as H.D. uses it in “The Flowering of the Rod” (1944), remakes reality by reconfiguring it. The palimpsestic design of Trilogy, the three-part epic poem of which “The Flowering of the Rod” is a part, offers healing through a revisioning of the world in feminist terms, created and represented by superimposed feminist characters and enacted by poetic language. This feminist use of the palimpsest effects healing and empowers women because it breaks with the traumatizing (for women) traditions that are imbued with masculine form and content. As a result, H.D. reclaims female types and reinvents them to form a new poetic template that counters the exclusion of women from master narratives and advocates healing from trauma. In short, H.D.’s palimpsestic design in Trilogy encourages the validation of a feminist worldview and ideology, thereby battling silence and fostering empowerment of women.

In H.D. scholarship, “The Flowering of the Rod”¹ is interpreted as a poem about healing and female-centered spirituality.² However, throughout H.D. scholarship on Trilogy, healing as a particular response to the trauma of a marginalized woman in patriarchal narrative, has garnered noticeably less scholarship.³ What has received even less attention are the ways in which H.D. enacts her template for healing through female-centered spirituality. Female-centered spirituality is the balm for traumatic wounds of various kinds⁴ in H.D.’s FOTR because women are written into a spiritual narrative; thus, inclusion and identification become possible. Specifically, H.D. manipulates poetics⁵ to produce a palimpsest⁶ that addresses the need for empowerment through a spirituality that is meaningful and accessible to women. In this palimpsest, Isis and Mary are inextricably linked together; their stories are superimposed upon one another. The result is a new narrative advocating for female-centered spiritual healing through the poetic performance of reclaiming and venerating Isis and Mary Magdalene in “The Flowering of the Rod.”

“The Flowering of the Rod,” the third section of Trilogy (1944), diverges from the previous two sections in that it concerns itself with healing, but it also continues the ideas presented in “The Walls Do Not Fall” and “Tribute to the Angels.” To clarify, “The Walls Do Not Fall” treats the traumatic implications of war, mental anguish and injury. “Tribute to Angels” focuses on the potentially revolutionary role of the female poet, a segue into the template for female spirituality and healing offered in “The Flowering of the Rod.” After identification with the Lady in “Tribute to Angels,” the poet can say, “I am branded by a word” (124). The word (or Logos as I identify it) is the all-powerful begetter; it creates. And so H.D. employs poetic techniques like metonymy to create a palimpsest that calls female-centered spirituality into being. The main point of poem 7 of “The Flowering of the Rod” is that resurrection, a healing or a metaphorical return to life, is “a sense of direction” rather than a destination (123). FOTR embarks on the journey to create space for women in religious narrative and to foster female-centered spirituality. The resurrection metaphorically stands for a turning in a new direction, following new philosophies, such as those presented by H.D.

Through poetic language and techniques, H.D. redefines God to make space for a female-centered spirituality in her palimpsestic design. Luce Irigaray articulates what is also H.D.’s agenda:

What we need, we who are sexed according to our genre, is a God to share, a verb to share and become. Defined as the mother-substance, often obscure, even occult, of the verb of men, we need our subject, our noun, our verb, our predicates [...] Woman needs a mirror to become a woman.

Having a God and becoming his/her genre go together. God is the other of which we are totally in need. (qtd. in Lucas 45)

H.D. does precisely what Irigaray foresees as necessary: she works within a palimpsestic structure to present holy women who stand in for God, often making obscure and occult references and using poetic devices to call into being a female-centered spirituality through the post-structuralist conception of God as G(o)od (M)other. In what I read as H.D.'s configuration in FOTR, woman, as represented by Isis and Mary(s), is the God Mother and the Good Other. In essence, H.D. is creating "women's spiritual poetry" to compensate for the collapse of "established epistemologies" and "male-centered theology" (Barnstone 191) during crisis. From her vantage point as witness, H.D. reshapes Logos to imbue it with female-centered spirituality as an answer to traumatic masculine narratives experienced by women.

The tendency to write women out of religious narrative is best exemplified in the canonized Biblical texts. Asserts Marina Camboni, "Secret texts such as the Gospel of Mary of Magdalene and The Wisdom of Faith confirm the existence of women teachers among the first Christians, and suggest that the activity of such women challenged and therefore was challenged by the orthodox communities who regarded Peter as their spokesman" (103). Due to fears and concerns over who could occupy substantial space in religious narrative or who should possess a voice in church, women such as Mary Magdalene were omitted from canonical Biblical texts. As a result, men like Peter ultimately shaped the Bible in the way it exists today. Accordingly, Peter instructs the disciples to exclude Mary in the Gospel of Thomas, another Gnostic and non-canonical

work: “Let Mary be excluded from among us, for she is a woman, and not worthy of Life” (Pagels 108). In The Wisdom of Faith,

Peter complains that Mary is dominating the conversation, even to the point of displacing the rightful priority of Peter himself and his brethren; he urges Jesus to silence her—and is quickly rebuked. Later, however, Mary admits to Jesus that she hardly dares to speak freely with him, because ‘Peter makes me hesitate: I am afraid of him, because he hates the female race.’ Jesus replies that whoever receives inspiration from the spirit is divinely ordained to speak, whether man or woman. (Pagels 115)

It appears from several texts that Peter strongly disapproved of Mary and felt threatened not only by her role as teacher but by her closeness to Jesus. Bart Ehrman emphasizes that the New Testament emerged from conflict and disputes, with the now canonical texts a product of the dominant group winning in the fight for control over discursive formations and discourse (2). These texts championed by the dominant group were heralded as the definitive books of the New Testament. In this struggle for control, The Gospel of Mary [of Magdalene] was prevented from canonization. Composed sometime in the second century, Mary’s Gospel exists today in two Greek fragments dating back to the third century and another incomplete but fuller Coptic manuscript from the fifth century. No perfectly extant manuscript has emerged or been discovered. The original misogynistic sentiment surrounding Mary prevailed to the extent that her story has been partially and perhaps permanently eradicated. Ten pages from the manuscript of The Gospel of Mary are missing (Ehrman 35).

In The Gospel of Mary, Peter asks Mary, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, to relate to the brethren what Jesus has told her. She proceeds to share her privileged knowledge, consisting apparently of a salvation narrative.⁷ Both Andrew and Peter challenge the validity of her vision and her right to have experienced it. Levi, however, rebukes Peter and maintains that Jesus loved Mary more than the rest of the apostles. The Gospel of Mary thus champions Mary as a spiritual receptacle, while overtly discouraging misogyny. The following excerpt illustrates the pivotal role Mary plays in this religious narrative and the un/favorable reception that she received.

When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was this point that the Savior had spoken with her. But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, ‘Say what you (wish to) say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.’ Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things. He questioned them about the Savior: ‘Did he really speak with a woman without our knowledge (and) not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?’

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, ‘My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?’ Levi answered and said to Peter, ‘Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. This is why he loved her more than us.’ (The Gospel of Mary 37)

What is especially intriguing about The Gospel of Mary is the special deference Mary receives from Jesus. The author of the Gospel expresses no authorial doubt that Mary had indeed been privileged with a vision and conversation with Jesus. The Gospel ends with the admonishment of Peter, the acknowledgment of Mary as a favorite, and a call to go forth and preach. The Gospel of Mary presents a different portrayal of Mary than the canonical Biblical texts, and H.D. similarly incorporates this portrayal into “The Flowering of the Rod.” Peter also denounces Mary in FOTR, and he does so by questioning Jesus’s judgment: “they call him a Master,/but Simon [Peter] questioned:/this man if he were a prophet, would have known/ who and what manner of woman this is” (143). Introducing Peter in order to refute traditional notions about Mary, H.D., in turn, casts her as a heroine. In the palimpsestic design, Mary of Magdalene is likened to the venerated Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is thus Mary-ed or venerated: “I am Mary—O, there are Marys a-plenty,/(though I am Mara, bitter) I shall be Mary-myrrh” (135). The closing of the FOTR features Mary cradling myrrh instead of a male baby. In essence, H.D. poetically reconfigures the Christian nativity scene.

The Marys are also mary-ed to Isis in “The Flowering of the Rod.” Kaspar, the Arab who gives the myrrh to Mary Magdalene, recognizes that Mary Magdalene represents “the old tradition, the old, old legend” (151). Kaspar, while studying Mary Magdalene, “in that half-second, saw/the whole scope and plan/of our and his civilization on this,/ his and our earth, before Adam” (154). Immediately identifying Mary with what is to come and what has passed, he sees in her the female embodiment of a female-centered spirituality: “*Lilith born before Eve/ and one born before Lilith,/ and Eve; we three are forgiven,/we are three of the seven daemons cast out of her*” (157). Associating

Mary Magdalene with the forgiveness and healing illustrated in Jesus's act of casting daemons out of her, Kaspar also casts her as a character in a line of spiritual women, Biblical and pagan. As the FOTR proclaims, "resurrection is remuneration" (123). Resurrecting the memories and attributes of goddesses allows Kasper to contextualize the identity and characteristics of Mary, thereby allowing him to meaningfully comprehend her. And Kaspar, "a heathen," might "whisper tenderly, those names/ without fear of eternal damnation,/ Isis, Astarte, Cyprus/ and the other four;/ he might re-name them, Ge-meter, De-meter, earth-mother/ or Venus/ in a star" (145). Because Kasper affirms holy women, past and present, he is able to appreciate Mary as a holy woman worthy of veneration. She is therefore included in religious narrative instead of having her identity "denied and assimilated to that of men," typical treatment of women in "religious rhetoric" (Pagels 108). The repercussion of orthodox male-centered theology is patriarchal social practice. According to Elaine Pagels, "orthodox Christians came to accept the domination of men over women as the proper, God-given order—not only for the human race, but also for the Christian churches" (116). This rhetoric disavowed the equality of women and instructed women to assume subservient roles.

But women were not always instructed to be subservient. On the contrary, the Egyptian Isis once reigned as the goddess supreme. The most complete version of the Isis myth⁸ is found in Plutarch around C.E. 120 (Cott 27). An Egyptian goddess, Isis was once despised in the Old Testament as Ashtoreth, also known as Astarte (Stone 123-4). Merlin Stone argues that "heathen idol worshipers of the Bible had been praying to a woman God—elsewhere known as [...] Isis" (124). Isis's influence spread from Egypt to Greece to Italy to France and to England (Cott 20). In fact, Isis came to be known as "the

goddess of many names” (Streete 370). Isis translates to Demeter in Greek (Streete 369), and H.D. names Demeter and Astarte when alluding to Isis (FOTR 145).

H.D. invokes Isis as goddess in order to marry her to the Marys, a move with historical precedent since Mary, mother of Jesus, historically took on the attributes of Isis; both Mary and Isis were known as the “Seat of Wisdom,” “Queen of Heaven,” and “Star of the Sea” (Cott 20). In the palimpsestic design, the attributes of each holy woman blend together as the identities and stories mix. The result produces a spiritual template that enacts veneration. Isis is reclaimed and aligned with Mary Magdalene, who, in turn, is reclaimed and aligned with Mary of Bethlehem. Isis’s goddess status affects Mary Magdalene’s identity and status because of the conflation of Isis and Mary. Kaspar perceives the identity and story of Isis in Mary Magdalene and “remembered” (FOTR 148), suggesting the re-membering of Osiris by Isis. Remembering allows for inclusion and identification for women not only in cultural memory but in discursive formations and, ultimately, in discourse itself. To be erased from discourse and to have no space in it is to have one’s identity erased and left unacknowledged and to be rendered nonexistent. As “The Story of Isis and Osiris” relates, “for to remember is to heal” (Cott 16). To remember holy women is to create a space for the affirmation of women.

The poetics of “The Flowering of the Rod” create a poetic palimpsest that emphasizes female-centered spirituality. The stories of many women are written and rewritten within the whole of Trilogy, culminating in a revisioning of spirituality to include and reclaim women and place them at the very core. Mary Magdalene, for example, is reclaimed and renamed in much the same way as Venus is in Trilogy; H.D. puns on the recovery of Venus from ventry to veneration. Mary Magdalene is conflated

with Mary the mother of Jesus, who, in turn, is given the attributes of Isis. Each of these women, with her own particular and overlapping story, can be conflated together to form a part of the whole, a part of the G(o)od (M)other.

The feminist use of language and poetics enacts healing and empowers women because it breaks with the traumatizing (for women) traditions imbued with masculine form and content. In “The Flowering of the Rod,” H.D. reclaims Mary Magdalene and reinvents her to form a new story that counters patriarchal master narratives. The poetics emphasize the feminist content. (M)other as metonymy⁹ is best witnessed in the lines concerning the Marys. Mary of Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are confused, conflated into the same personality as seen in the following excerpts:

or was that Mary of Bethany?

in any case—as to this other Mary (129)

I am Mary, she said, of Magdala,

I am Mary—O, there are Marys a-plenty (135)

The use of metonymy stresses the wholeness of (m)otherhood. Metonymy refuses the typically linear and contained masculine narrative and, instead, endorses fluidity and wholeness. The desire for wholeness stems from the desire to heal from the fragmentation of trauma. The marginalization of women in masculine narratives, as played out in the Christian narrative sketched in “The Flowering of the Rod,” is resoundingly refuted and reclaimed in this third section of *Trilogy*. H.D. combats traditional marginalization by foregrounding the potency of Mary. H.D.’s Mary withstands sexism, and she succeeds in paying homage to Jesus. The figures of Mary are part of H.D.’s template for healing. Endorsing female spirituality through representation of Mary and enacting a feminist

Logos through the poetics, “The Flowering of the Rod” fosters spiritual healing by presenting the G(o)od (M)other as an option. It models a female narrative attuned to an awakening of spirituality and, by extension, healing. The focus of the Christ narrative is Mary in Trilogy; she, as Hardin points out, even becomes myrrh, transforming herself into a gift in much the same way Christ does (155). Thus, the narrative is rewritten not only to accommodate women but feature them as the heroines, the main characters. The various conflated characters representing Mary are instrumental in the palimpsestic framework of Trilogy as a whole.

Spiritual healing becomes possible when space is etched out for the G(o)od (M)other figure. In order to deconstruct masculine theology and narrative, the otherness of Mary(s) also is foregrounded; she is described as an “unbalanced, neurotic woman/who was naturally reviled for having left home/and not caring for house-work” (129). She is simultaneously revered by H.D. and reviled by history for behaving contrary to expectations of women. Her disregard for convention engenders the notion that she is a thief, stealing house-money or the poor-box money in poem 12 of “Tribute to the Angels.” Moreover, Mary

knew how to detach herself,

another unforgivable sin,

and when stones were hurled,

she simply wasn't there;

she wasn't there and then she appeared,

not a beautiful woman really—would you say?

certainly not pretty;

what struck the Arab was that she was unpredictable;

this had never happened before—a woman—

well yes—if anyone did, he knew the world—a lady

had not taken the hint, had not sidled gracefully

at a gesture of implied dismissal

and with no apparent offence really,

out of the door. (131)

The irony imbued in this passage derives from the inequity in gender relations. Because Mary can survive independently of male imposed codes of behavior, she is othered. She is not forgivable, attractive, predictable, or respectable in masculine gendered, traditional codes, and, therefore, is the Good Other in the post-structuralist conception of G(o)od (M)other. Moreover, the attention given to her physical body bespeaks the masculine verdict of her spiritual and social worth. Mary conducts herself outside of cultural norms; she does not remove or erase herself as expected by the male Arab. But Mary removes herself when metaphoric stones are hurled at her. She has the ability to detach herself and stand outside. And so the verdict is that Mary is emphatically not “pretty.”

H.D. spends more time describing Mary than she dedicates to any other entity in Trilogy in order to reclaim her. By claiming Mary and repositioning her, a new narrative that fosters female spiritual healing, is possible. Hence Mary should be viewed as a pivotal character. She is the first to witness Jesus's resurrection, which is why "The Flowering of the Rod," treating resurrection/healing (coming back to life literally and metaphorically), contains the most explicit poems concerning her. But she is also reclaimed by H.D. to star as a principal figure in the palimpsest of female power. H.D.'s vision consists of "an awareness of the 'spell'-ing and transformative power of poetry itself" (Zajdel 7), which can be witnessed in the line "mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary" (71). The word "mother" and the word "Mary" are positioned in such a way that they echo each other. Mary is the enactment of the G(o)od (M)other. She is the God Mother, but the invocation of Maia suggests that she is also positioned as the Good Other. The transformation of water to mother to Maia the mother of pagan gods to the biblical Mary(s) is an instance of metonymy effecting the palimpsestic design. The pagan Maia is given the positive attributes of Mary by metonymic association and is thereby transformed and reclaimed. Likewise, Isis is mary-ed to Mary in the same way that the Marys are mary-ed to one other. The palimpsestic design marries the stories and identities of pagan goddesses like Isis to the biblical Marys.

Metaphor also speaks to the palimpsestic design because it is indivisible from the text as a component of the text. The palimpsestic design is itself a metaphor connecting sundry holy women and their stories. Moreover, the use of body metaphor in FOTR allows for a manifestation or transubstantiation of abstract ideas about spirituality into physical images. Contemporary discussion and explication of the body metaphor as a

recurring image in feminine writing and poetic theory demands that the body cannot be separated or extracted from the text. As metaphor, the body speaks to the abstract. Within a poem treating spirituality, the body can stand in for the abstract aspects of an embodied person. In other words, a body metaphor points to mental or spiritual states, themes, or ideas. The representation of the body is the vehicle for the underlying concept (the tenor) related to a spiritual or mental state. As Hélène Cixous aptly writes, “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies” (875). The burden of tradition, whether religious or literary, leaves women writers little choice and room to exist and create if they do not embrace an emancipatory poetics. Cixous understands that “writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (878). Likewise, although reaching the same conclusion by a different epistemological path, Annette Kolodny views “literature as a social institution, embedded [...] within the particular physical and mental artifacts of the society from which it comes” (173) and exhorts women to take action against the discrimination of women. H.D. takes up the feminist agenda advocated by Cixous and Kolodny in *Trilogy*. Within “The Flowering of the Rod,” Mary and Isis function as bodily spectacles and as spiritual receptacles. “The Flowering of the Rod” is certainly a feminist work; it extols the feminine by representing women through feminist decisions in poetics in order to create a female template for spiritual healing.

Because Mary is the embodiment of female spiritual healing, her own physical body becomes a trope¹⁰ of a consciousness for resistance and transformation in “The

Flowering of the Rod.” What enables Mary to embody strength is her self-reflective knowledge that she is breaking gender constructs and refusing to participate in the coded behavior valued by traditional masculine narrative.

she understood; this was his second rebuff

but deliberately, she shut the door

she stood with her back against it;

planted there, she flung out her arms,

a further barrier,

and her scarf slipped to the floor (134)

The presentation of Mary’s body works through metaphor. Her act of closing the door represents defiance on many levels, not simply a physical separation of her person from another. The crucifixion stance she assumes, back against the door with arms flung out, begs an allusion to Jesus. She represents a barrier to masculine-centered theology. Mary’s unveiling emphasizes her body as spectacle/text, but the tenor of the body metaphor points to Mary as a receptacle for a different kind of spirituality from that which excludes her.

it was her hair—un-maidenly—

It was hardly decent of her to stand there,

unveiled, in the house of a stranger. (134)

he handed her her scarf;

it was unseemly that a woman appear disordered, dishevelled;

it was unseemly that a woman

appear at all. (137)

Instead of disappearing from the narrative, Mary assumes a role tantamount to that of a principal figure. Instead of covering her body, she reveals herself. The body becomes a synecdoche for spirituality, able to represent psychological trauma through metaphor. Mary as text produces a response to the trauma of being omitted from religious narrative, as well as, more generically, a template for female-centered healing from trauma(s) suffered by women in general. Sarah H. S. Graham reads the whole of Trilogy as primarily concerned with the female body; she reads the body as a frame and equates it with wall, especially in “The Walls Do Not Fall.” As a survivor of the London Blitz of WWII, H.D.’s “body survived against the odds” (Graham 170), and Trilogy works to inspire hope in survivors; H.D. is writing to survivors rather than eulogizing the dead. Her work is “ultimately a production for the survivors of cataclysm” (Detloff 258). But she chronicles the fear of violation and annihilation, and fear and annihilation are not solely relegated to physical, bodily fears. The vulnerable female body can stand in metaphorically for the psychologically traumatized woman whom has been written out. This body imagery showcases resistance through its overt embodiment. For instance, while Graham interprets “rails gone” (3) as a lack of protection for the vulnerable female body, she also acknowledges that symbolism at many levels should be considered.

Asserts Graham, “On a more symbolic level, too, the missing partitions that create ‘inside’ and ‘out’ can be applied to the body, whose physical shell—represented by the newly stripped ‘town square’—is now in danger of being violated” (165). The model Graham invokes (inside and outside, not inside vs. outside) reinforces the synecdochal¹¹ relationship of the body and the mind. The suffering body, in turn, invokes the suffering mind. Thus, Mary’s courage in becoming a spectacle, in unveiling herself confronts old psychological fears and replaces the old narrative with new hope for spiritual healing in the shape of a new narrative. Instead of disappearing from the text, Mary becomes the text for female-centered theology. With Mary as text, hope is bolstered by the potential for spiritual healing.

Veneration of holy women allows women to feel included in religious narrative, a discourse in which they have been omitted. The validation of identification of holy women and their attendant stories opens up space for women and denies their erasure in discursive formations. Included in H.D.’s agenda is the recovery and veneration of previously defiled women. Indeed, H.D. writes in “Tribute to the Angels”: “Venus whose name is kin/to venerate,/venerator” (75). A few lines earlier, she links Aphrodite, giving her the appositive “holy name,” to Astarte and Venus. All of these female figures have been labeled as pagan and thus as unworthy of veneration. H.D. reclaims them by superimposing her female characters and having them echo each other through palimpsestic strategies. Perhaps what is most important in her agenda is not the pagan or sacrosanct reputations ascribed to the goddesses but the embodiment through metaphor of powerful women in a religious narrative. The importance of this agenda is articulated by Nellie Morton in “The Goddess as Metaphoric Image”:

I began to see more clearly how the God of patriarchal religions could have been a living metaphor at one time. But over the centuries the world has been filled with such male, power-over, and status quo images it has become a dead metaphor.

The Goddess ushered in a reality that respects the sacredness of my existence, that gives me self-esteem so I can perceive the universe and its people through my woman-self and not depend on the perception conditioned by patriarchal culture and patriarchal religion. I do not have to receive my identity or renew it through another gender [... The Goddess as metaphor will] help break the patriarchy that creates discriminations, oppressions, poverty, and wars. (115)

Once titled the War Trilogy,¹² Trilogy evokes poetics and images to create feminist responses to patriarchy and misogyny. “The Flowering of the Rod” enacts what it advocates: powerful holy women occupy the attention of the work and are recast in a positive light. Essentially, FOTR elicits female-centered or feminist spirituality.

The best example of reclamation and veneration in FOTR is Mary Magdalene. She obtains the bundle of myrrh from Kaspar in order to anoint Christ’s feet, while simultaneously identifying herself as myrrh (associated with healing throughout FOTR) and thus making herself a gift to God too. Accordingly, Kaspar’s “attitude towards Mary of Magdala, initially suspicious, changes radically, when in a flash of recognition, he brings together the two Marys—Mary the mother of Christ and Mary the whore—thus perceiving their core identity” (Camboni 96). The palimpsestic design recovers Mary Magdalene from a whore and reinstates her as a virtuous women in her own right. Trilogy

ends with Mary cradling myrrh, thereby underscoring the healing which accompanies the inclusion and veneration of women in religious narrative. Earlier in FOTR, Mary equates herself and Mary the mother of Jesus in the metonymic “Mary-myrrh” (135). Dennis Brown concludes that myrrh is the “main symbolisation” (356) in Trilogy and speculates as to the poetic connotations of myrrh: Could myrrh be “an HD conflation of ‘Ma’ and ‘her’”? (Brown 356). This conflation fits in with the post-structuralist configuration of the G(o)od (M)other figure. The conflation of Marys represents both the Good Other and the God Mother. Brown, then, is quite astute when he writes of FOTR that the “poetry prays as it pleases as it heals” (358).

Through a unique poetics—manipulating metonymy, synecdoche, and body metaphor—H.D. invites spiritual healing. These poetic techniques work together to produce a palimpsest, creating space in masculine narrative for holy women. Female spiritual healing is solicited through poetics and, as a result, a poetic narrative championing women. New space is created in FOTR for women in religious narrative because H.D. literally writes in female figures who usurp pivotal roles from men. Mary Magdalene is reclaimed from ventry to veneration in the same way as the mythical Isis in order to counter the patriarchal exclusion engendered in the traditional masculine Christian narrative. The biblical Marys have little individual identity outside of their communal palimpsestic identity; they each function as stand-ins for each other because H.D. assigns them fluid identities. These fluid identities are a direct effect of the palimpsestic design of FOTR. Through palimpsest, the mary-ing of Isis and Mary Magdalene is reinforced. The Marys are elevated to God-like status in several ways—and Isis’s goddess status lends itself to the configuration of the Marys as G(o)od (M)other,

the God Mother and the Good Other. Quite literally, the Marys and Mary Magdalene in particular take up the most space; the most prominent images are dedicated to them. Presumably, Mary Magdalene (a representation not only of herself but Mary the mother of Jesus) is featured at the very end of FOTR as the begetter of new life. Instead of a male baby, Mary holds a bundle of myrrh. Instead of a male God-like figure, Mary and, by extension, Isis are figured as the saviors. Her theory of poetics argues for space within discourse for women. With space allotted for women in religious narratives, women become empowered through spiritual healing achieved through identification with a God attributed with female characteristics and power.¹³

Notes

¹ “The Flowering of the Rod” will hereafter be referred to mainly as the abbreviation FOTR.

² According to Melody Zajdel, “At the heart of H.D.’s vision lies the reclamation of the empowering presence of the female (Our Lady, the one mother), a belief in the unifying and self-affirming nature of human spiritual development, and an awareness of the ‘spell’-ing and transformative power of poetry itself” (7). She understands the primary difference between H.D. and those who practice masculine modernism is H.D.’s “focus on process (generation) vs. systems (stasis)” (8). I pick up from here to connect H.D.’s concern with process and generation to regeneration and the palimpsest design of FOTR.

³ Michael Hardin dedicates his article, “H.D.’s Trilogy: Speaking Through the Margins,” to this issue.

⁴ Responses to the trauma of war and to the omission of women in patriarchal narrative, especially in contemporary Christianity, are two types of traumatic situations to which H.D. continually alludes. “The Walls Do Not Fall” primarily deals with the trauma of war, while “Tribute to the Angels” shifts its focus to the need for the empowered representation of women in discursive formations. “The Flowering of the Rod” offers healing, a response to trauma, by placing women at the center of spirituality, thereby enacting the need realized in “Tribute to the Angels” with the image of the Lady with the open (and blank) book.

⁵ I use poetics to mean the techniques of poetry or language that enable a certain effect or enact an effect. Earl Miner defines poetics thus: “Poetics, then, is the most specific sense a systematic theory of poetry. It attempts to define the nature of poetry, its kinds and forms, its resources of device and structure, the principles that govern it, the functions that distinguish it from other arts, the conditions under which it can exist, and its effects of readers or auditors” (930). I am interested in how H.D.’s poetics contribute to the overall effect of what I understand as her agenda in FOTR. I place metonymy, metaphor, and the post-structuralist play with language within the realm of poetics.

⁶ In her astute article, “Re(reading)-Writing Palimpsest of Myth,” Rose Lucas argues that H.D.’s use of a palimpsest structure in Trilogy and Helen in Egypt allow her to combat the phallogocentric system because it allows her to create with a uniquely female voice. “As the crucial image of the palimpsest suggests, the task of the poet as scribe is thus paradoxical; she reveals or recovers what had been previously been inscribed and perhaps obscured on the tablet of the cultural text, and also adds her own text or mythic story, thereby also re-covering certain aspects of the (writing of the) past” (Lucas 47). Marina

Camboni refers to H.D.'s palimpsest design as "hyper-textual technique" (103). H.D.'s own "Tribute to the Angels" gives a more poetic description of what could be called a palimpsest: "the same—different—the same attributes,/different yet the same as before" (105).

⁷ The pages concerning Mary's vision are lost, only the beginning and the end of the vision are extant.

⁸ Isis re-members her husband Osiris, collecting his body parts, after he is dismembered by his vengeful brother Set. She embalms Osiris and magically becomes pregnant with their son Horus. Horus was believed to be "reborn in the person of each Egyptian pharaoh. For this reason, beginning in Egypt and eventually throughout the Greco-Roman world in which she was widely worshipped, Isis was considered the goddess who had supreme control over the power of the cosmos, including life and death, and most especially fate" (Streete 369).

⁹ Metonymy derives from Greek, meaning "change of name." In short, metonymy is "a figure in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal, or conceptual relation" (Martin 783). A perfect example of metonymy is H.D.'s line "mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary" from "Tribute to the Angels" (71). H.D. moves from the invocation of sea and lake to the emphasis of mother, ending with the allusion to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She suggests through this wordplay that Maia, the mother of Hermes, and Mary(s)—all the Marys who attend Jesus in the New Testament--echo each other and are metonymic. One can virtually stand in for the other in Trilogy.

¹⁰ I use trope to mean an extended metaphor, a metaphor carried throughout a text.

¹¹ Synecdoche is Greek for the “act of taking together” or “understanding one thing with another”; it is “a rhetorical figure in which part is substituted for the whole” (Martin 1261). Examples of synecdoche are the crown for the king and hired “hands” for hired men. In FOTR, I am arguing that the body imagery embedded in the Isis myth and the representation of Mary are depicted as evidence of mental states and spirituality, as well as more closely knitting together Isis and Mary. The body speaks for the mind in H.D.’s depiction of Mary Magdalene especially. Body metaphor is the word manifested into visual imagery to invoke comparisons with mental and spiritual states.

¹² According to Adalaide Morris, “First called War Trilogy and then, more simply, Trilogy, this poem can be interpreted as something like the signal the building superintendent expected to find: a warning, a command, an incitement to concerted action” (121). While I also read H.D. as advocate, I read “The Flowering of the Rod” as an enactment of her agenda. She presents a template for female-centered spirituality and elicits it.

¹³ I would like to thank Kristie S. Fleckenstein for her suggestions and comments about this article.

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