



**HAL**  
open science

## H.D.'s Trilogy: The Multiplicity of Being

Daniel Thomières

► **To cite this version:**

Daniel Thomières. H.D.'s Trilogy: The Multiplicity of Being. *Enthymema*, 2015, 12, pp.276-302.  
10.13130/2037-2426/4742 . hal-02488510

**HAL Id: hal-02488510**

**<https://hal.univ-reims.fr/hal-02488510v1>**

Submitted on 22 Feb 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

H.D.'s *Trilogy*: The Multiplicity of Being

Daniel Thomières

Université de Reims – Champagne Ardenne

---

**Abstract**

This essay is an epistemological interrogation and should be read as one possible approach among others to H.D.'s poetic experiment in *Trilogy*. It argues that the empiricist tradition provides us with a series of concepts that may help us make sense of the poem, or, rather, understand a little better how the poem makes sense. In this respect, H.D.'s numerous polytheistic mythological allusions can be problematized as being at the service of a philosophy of the human subject, not considered as a fixed, alienated entity, but as a constantly evolving multiplicity whose main activity is to construct new relations or syntheses, thereby endlessly constructing itself in the process.

---

**Keywords**H.D., *Trilogy*, modernism, Deleuze, Bergson**Contact**daniel.thomieres@univ-reims.fr

---

H.D.? the complete poet? Over the years, after many a crisis, she undeniably became something of the kind, poet, philosopher, linguist, historian, theologian, etc., except of course that no-one and nothing are ever complete... That in point of fact is what she discovered and what she started to unravel in her poetry: anything that appears to possess a unity is, on closer scrutiny, an unstable multiplicity. There are only multiplicities without a unity, since objects, people, the world, are made up of multiplicities. To believe in wholes is a sign of alienation that ultimately imprisons us in a logic of war and death — actual death or death-in-life. Put another way, it could be said that H.D. writes to tell us that reading, and more generally being alive, involves making implicit a fundamental choice about those multiplicities which are constantly in the process of being transformed, even when they seem to be stable: should we turn lead into gold, or the rails around the square into guns, or, on the contrary, should we be like the worm that metamorphoses itself into a butterfly or the grain of sand inside the shell as it becomes a pearl? The poet's poetical work is an impassioned plea in which she endeavors to persuade us to choose the second option: create possibilities of life out of books. This essay proposes to re-read her War Trilogy (1942-1945, published as *Trilogy* in 1973 by Norman Holmes Pearson).<sup>1</sup> The collection has the London Blitz as its starting point, but there are very few allusions to the war in it, as if the scope of the poem was much more general and much more comprehensive. Fundamentally, H.D. writes about life, and it must be recognized that *Trilogy* still makes sense to us in the 21st century, whether we live in Eng-

<sup>1</sup> *Trilogy* is made up of three sections: "The Walls Do Not Fall," "Tribute to the Angels," and "The Flowering of the Rod," each of them containing 43 poems. For simplicity's sake, reference will be to section followed by the number of the individual poem (i.e. W3, T23 or F43). The reason for this choice is that referring to pages can only prove opaque to readers who need to understand easily which section and what part of that section are concerned in this essay.

land or in other places of the globe. Behind the myths and the gods she evokes, there is a specific logic which raises questions, suggests choices, answers, possibilities. The essay will therefore endeavor to reconstruct H.D.'s logic.

In order to understand the inherent logic of Trilogy, it will be argued that it is legitimate to look upon the poem as an empiricist poem, which does not mean to say that H.D. was a conscious empiricist, or even an empiricist without being aware of it. Possibly she was, but that question is largely irrelevant for our purpose. We are not concerned with an individual, or even with her mind, that is to say we are not concerned with historical facts, but with what constitutes the power of a poem upon its readers.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, interpreting a text does not mean repeating it *verbatim*, which in any case would be impossible, as, in the reading process, our minds are always more or less active constructing meaning, bringing to bear our reading habits, our values and our habituses upon the network of words on the page. Poems make sense in contexts which the poet who wrote them understandably never anticipated, or, rather, these contexts in which we find ourselves today suddenly begin making sense for us thanks to the potentialities of the words on the page of a text we happen to be reading. Etymologically speaking, the term *interpret* includes the prefix *inter* (between, in the middle), and it refers to an activity that could be called a disjunctive synthesis. With each new reading, new meanings, new relations, new possibilities are produced between heterogeneous elements, that is to say between *i*) the poem, and *ii*) this or that particular reader caught in a specific series of social contexts.

The disjunctive synthesis is indeed the key empiricist concept.<sup>3</sup> As is well-known, empiricism is an old English tradition. It is not a system, but a way of articulating problems, or, if one prefers, a way of problematizing reality. True empiricism started with David Hume and acquired a new impetus in the 20th century with William James, Henri Bergson, A.N. Whitehead, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze (who was the one who coined the term *disjunctive synthesis*). Hume helped us understand that what is constructed is relations — or syntheses — between heterogeneous singularities (sensations, objects or ideas already constituted, etc.) These syntheses are disjunctive: out of the non rapport

---

<sup>2</sup> One may like to recall what Bertrand Russell is reported to have said about *Principia Mathematica* which he wrote with Alfred North Whitehead: «When we were working on it, only God, Whitehead, and I knew what it meant. Now Whitehead is dead and I have forgotten». Even if the quotation is possibly not authentic, the fact that it certainly is jocular doesn't prevent it from being, at the same time, also extremely serious. As the various modern theories of reception have conclusively shown, the meaning of a text is (ideally...) half in the text and half in this or that concrete reader's mind, or, more importantly, it is in its effects which can be far and ranging.

<sup>3</sup> Trying to define empiricism is a highly difficult enterprise, if only because the term was first invented in the 19th century and was thus not used at the time of Locke or Hume. Saying that all knowledge comes from our five senses, as Locke argued, is probably true but of very little relevance, at least when it comes to reading poems like H.D.'s *Trilogy*. Assuming that there is a general agreement as to the capital importance of stressing that nothing is innate, rather than going back to John Locke, the official founder of what we today call classic empiricism, it seems preferable to turn to his follower David Hume and his 1748 *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* which showed that not only our ideas are constructed, but that the thinking subject is also constructed at the same time. That unquestionably was Hume's greatest discovery. It follows that the subject is not a given, but an entity that is in fact always in process. It is a complete structure that cannot be limited to an I or a self, but that must be considered as an ever-moving process encompassing an assemblage or synthesis of different ideas. (In the 18th century, the term *idea* stood for «whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding, when a man thinks» (Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I, 1, 8, 25), which includes: perceptions, ideas, cultural references, etc.).

a rapport is created.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, subjects (which, any more than objects, are not essences) create themselves at the same time as they create objects, giving them a consistency of their own as they give themselves both a temporary sense of unity and identity. Hume was perfectly clear on that account: empiricism is about belief, that is to say that subjects believe in themselves just as they believe in the objects and relationships they have produced. In other words, objects and subjects are fictions, as is their unity, and as also is the fact that we believe that they constitute wholes, and it should go without saying that fictions can be deconstructed, and then re-built differently making use of the multiplicities of singularities that went into their construction.<sup>5</sup> It will readily be admitted that H.D. keeps showing us that it is an illusion to look upon people and things at wholes, just as words should never be taken for granted. In other words, one can alter one's beliefs and that is precisely what *Trilogies* is about.

H.D. never mentions the thinkers in the empiricist tradition, but it seems safe to say that she would have recognized herself in the concepts they forged, as this essay will try to show. In consequence, it can be maintained that the possibilities inherent in H.D.'s *Trilogies* can be unfolded at three levels.<sup>6</sup> The poem first offers a method aimed at posing problems and recalling forgotten multiplicities. A first approach should thus deal with a consideration of time and of the importance the palimpsest principle. Secondly, what needs to be analyzed is what could be called the poet's 'vocabulary', the images she conjures up, that is to say the objects (including people, gods and goddesses and the space which they constitute) upon which the method is applied and which constitute the terms of the syntheses. Lastly, it is necessary to ask the question of H.D.'s "first philosophy:" what is the ultimate purpose of this plurality of objects – themselves made up of multiplicities of singularities – caught up in unending processes of transformation? Interestingly, when her *Trilogies* invites us to rediscover and celebrate possibilities of life, H.D. is not far from the *élan vital* which Bergson posited. In other words, the poem fundamentally promotes a radically non-teleological logic, in which new relations and syntheses are constantly being (re)constructed.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze alludes to the literary possibilities of disjunctive syntheses in *Anti-Oedipus* (written in collaboration with Félix Guattari), showing that they always operate on fragments that will never constitute wholes: «Disjunctions, by the very fact that they are disjunctions, are inclusive. Even consumptions are transitions, processes of becoming, and returns. Maurice Blanchot has found a way to pose the problem in the most rigorous terms, at the level of the literary machine: how to produce, how to think about fragments whose sole relationship is sheer difference – fragments that are related to one another only in that each of them is different – without having recourse either to any sort of original totality (not even one that has been lost), or to a subsequent totality that may not yet have come about?» (42).

<sup>5</sup> Following Gilbert Simondon's *L'Individu et sa genèse psycho-biologique* with its theory of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, Deleuze duly insists in *Logic of Sense* on that absolutely crucial point: «Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distributed in a "potential" which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing itself, although the figures of this actualization do not at all resemble the realized potential» (102).

<sup>6</sup> This threefold progression from form to meanings is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's *Bergsonism* – a veritable celebration of the fertility of empiricism – in which he shows that it is crucial to distinguish successively: i) method, ii) content, subject-matter, and iii) ontology.

<sup>7</sup> In spite of her reputation as a somewhat obscure 20th century poet, H.D. has been lucky with university scholars. She is the subject of a number of outstanding studies which have radically altered our perception of her work. Susan Edmunds and her remarkable *Out of Line: History, Psychoanalysis, & Mon-*

## 1. Of time and the poem

A first contact with *Trilogy* should always take into account the fact that the poem is a palimpsest, or, more to the point, that all texts are palimpsests and that words are fundamentally palimpsestic. That term is admittedly a metaphor, but it underlines an important truth that is too often overlooked: time is inherently inscribed in written language and, to some extent, H.D.'s poem can be read as a reminder of that reality for those of us who might have forgotten, as it is so easy to become a one-dimensional man and to content oneself with the surface of texts, that is to say with alienation, conformity, subjection. Reading then becomes a conditioning, a succession of reactions or reflex actions. H.D. counters that, on the contrary, reading and interpreting a poem is a radically active process. In other words, a given signifier *a* should/could lead us to discover a whole series of signifieds, *x, y, z, ...*, taking us away from the present/presence of the surface of the text, and enabling us to take into consideration past references, questions and problems often long forgotten. A word in a poem is thus not to be taken for granted. It implies what has fortunately not been destroyed by wars, the "walls" not fallen – that is our human culture – which "continue to prophesy / from the stone papyrus" (W1). These 'walls' have to be interpreted, or, if one prefers, they represent traces from the past which the logic of death has not utterly destroyed.<sup>8</sup> Coming to terms with our world has then to do with remembering what was before, and then unfolding and explicating, that is multiplying and complexifying the virtualities that are part of the semantic potential of the words on the page.<sup>9</sup>

*tage* in H.D.'s *Long Poems* is one that immediately springs to mind. It would have been both silly and pointless to pursue a line of research that has received practically definitive answers. This essay accordingly tries to address grounds not already covered and has consequently chosen a different approach: an epistemological interrogation of the logic at work in *Trilogy*. Strangely enough, the question was raised in a number of essays going back to the 70s, but unfortunately not pursued. It is thus always extremely rewarding to go back to Susan Gubar's 1978 "The Echoing Spell of H.D.'s *Trilogy*." It will perhaps be taken as an exaggeration if one said that Ms. Gubar saw and said everything that was to be seen and said, but that is not far from the truth. She proved a highly intelligent reader, she knew that what mattered was to pose problems, and she read *Trilogy* closely (something which sadly quite a few of her successors failed to do.) It is also fair to salute Rachel Blau DuPlessis's highly perceptive 1986 book which provides an excellent analysis of the objects and "characters" in the poem. In addition, DuPlessis is aware of the numerous theoretical implications of multiplicity for H.D. Last but not least, she reminds us that the poet's ambition can be seen as an attempt at rediscovering the deep-seated complicity that prevailed in the polytheistic ancient world between art, religion and medicine. This essay will very modestly try to follow in these steps.

<sup>8</sup> In his book on Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Deleuze develops a strikingly similar conception of interpretation. He also feels the need to invoke ancient Egypt in order to free himself from conventional attitudes to reading: «Learning is essentially concerned with signs. Signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if they emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not 'the Egyptologist' of something. One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything which teaches us something emits signs, every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs. Proust's work is based not on the exposition of memory, but on the apprenticeship to signs.» (*Proust and Signs*, 4).

<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps appropriate to recall here that, eleven years after his study of David Hume, Gilles Deleuze published his book on Marcel Proust, *Proust and Signs*. Long before he composed *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze shows that the one mental operation required to think about ourselves and the world is *folding* (*plicare* in Latin, as in *imply, implicate, explicate, complicate*, etc.) Reality endlessly

The occasion of *Trilogy* is the war, war, the sword, and, in this respect, H.D. is perfectly clear: «Remember, O Sword, [...] / *in the beginning / was the Words*» (W10). The problem (and it is a problem) is that we need to be reminded of the origin of the *sword*: it was a *word*... The mental operation which is implied is to say the least extremely strange: we are asked to 'remember' a false etymology... In fact, what the poet invites her readers to do is produce a disjunctive synthesis between *word* and *sword*, that is to say, create a relation between seemingly unconnected elements, and find a problem where there was none: It would be superficial to accept the presence of the war and its consequences as something inevitable. War and death, and the logic they implicate, unfolded from *words*, some words leading to war and others to different possibilities of life, or, more probably, they originated from the same *words* which were unfolded differently by different people and groups.<sup>10</sup> Everything, seems to say H.D., is in the (un)foldings, the connecting of words at different levels to other parts of reality. Put differently, words only exist through their effects on the world, on people, on bodies, etc.

Claiming that the *Word* is a beginning means, for instance, that a *spell* — a series of words heard by Kaspar — can immediately imply (phonically, but also semantically) a *shell*, that is one of the objects/concepts regularly invoked in *Trilogy* and evoking a womb-like cavity as well as the possibility of spiraling communication, among other potentialities (more below). Hearing the spell triggers off a process in which Kaspar becomes both himself and other, liberating himself at the same time as he liberates Mary Magdalene and all the despised mother goddesses deeply folded inside her. In the poem, men, magi, gods are to be seen as problems, not as unified wholes that never evolve. *Osiris*, for instance, is addressed to as *Sire* (F40), but that is not a conventional mode of address or an act of submission. It implies the recognition that the Egyptian god first and foremost represents something that is virtual: *Rise?* Underneath the omnipresence of death, the anagram hints at the possibility of resurrection and at the unending creation of new life and new perspectives. *Osiris* can also be linked to *Sirius* (*ibid.*) This etymological play on words is a false one here again, but, if *Osiris* is also *Sirius* (Isis's star whose sighting heralded the return of life which accompanied spring together with the flooding of the Nile), we understand that, just like the meeting of Kaspar and Magdalene was essential, the synthesis of Isis and Osiris, man and woman, is necessary in order to go beyond the logic of war and death.

proliferates, in the same movement as it creates novelty. The same could be said of literary texts. They produce new possibilities of meaning and new possibilities of life as long as there are readers ready to unfold them and unfold themselves at the same time in order to refold themselves and the world in ever new assemblages. As Deleuze explains: «Certain Neoplatonists used a profound word to designate the original state that precedes any development, any deployment, any 'explication': *complication*, which envelops the many in the One and affirms the unity of the multiple. Eternity did not seem to them the absence of change, nor even the extension of a limitless existence, but the complicated state of time itself (*uno ictu mutationes tuas complectitur*). The Word, *omnia complicans*, and containing all essences, was defined as the supreme complication, the complication of contraries, the unstable opposition.» (*Proust and Signs*, 45).

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would say that this approach implies that *Trilogy* displays the characteristics of what they call *minor literature*: «[I]t is expression that precedes contents, whether to prefigure the rigid forms into which contents will flow [*ie., the Sword for H.D.*] or to make them take flight along lines of escape or transformation [*ie., the Word for H.D.*]. But this primacy doesn't imply any idealism.» (*Kafka*, 85).

The whole of *Trilogy* encompasses a logic of life and resurrection, which is probably why the poem uses the ancient Egyptian noun to designate the phoenix, “*bennu* bird” (W25). *Be new?* As regards the jewel in “Tribute to the Angels,” it is nameless, but (perhaps not) strangely, an example of it is given as it were in passing: «a white agate» (T13). *A gate?* False etymology and erroneous pronunciation, but nonetheless a clear indication: it would be a mistake to remain faithful to the surface of words. Unfolding their virtualities always takes us to other dimensions, new territories, problems forgotten in the past. In this respect, Mary (Magdalene) is a central ‘character’ in the poem. Of course, she is the one who usually leaves doors «*ajar*», whereas Kaspar and his male friends like «hedg-es and fences» (F34). *Ajar* is also a *jar*, and jars belong to a network of shell/womb-like objects that proliferate. In addition, a *door* is also a *road*! Thanks to this palindrome, the poem opens the door to a new interpretation of Christ’s cross — always associated by H.D. not to death but to resurrection. Like Venus, like Maia, Mary carries within herself the principles of change and renewal. In *Trilogy*, H.D. reevaluates these female figures whose potentials we seem to have forgotten: *Venus* is not to be remembered through the word «*vener*» which «stands for impurity» (11). *Veneration* could be a better way of unfolding the meaning of the goddess’s name.

As for Maia, she belongs to a series of almost alchemical associations/transformations involving the Lady and the manifold Marys. They start with *marab* (Hebrew for bitter), a word which then unfolds in the following way: «mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary, / Star of the Sea / Mother» (T8). The material properties of these words — on the face of it, unrelated from a semantic point of view — produce new meaning and give birth to a chain whose final term is *Mother*, in other words not a final term... A mother is always a beginning, or, more specifically, a locus of possibilities not yet defined that readers can tap in order to live more fully. Three procedures come into play. First, associations, almost in a Freudian manner: sea water is bitter (like war, death, pain, evil?), which leads us to the sea (*mar* in Latin, and *mere*, a pond among other possibilities) out of which came Venus/Aphrodite (that is the etymology of her Greek name), but which is also the other name of Mary («Star of the Sea»). Second, the necessity of choice is a constant reference in H.D.’s poem. Choice can be negative (as in the transformation of books into gun cartridges) or positive: «tears» are turned into «life», and death and bitterness are purified as in a crucible in order to become Mother, life, love... Thirdly (and once again), etymology (correct this time!): Maia’s name signifies little mother in Greek, or, more precisely, mid-wife. (Socrates adopted the word when he invented his art of maieutics). The implication is clear, especially if one remembers that Maia was Hermes’s mother: language, oration, prophesy, poetry (including cheating with words, stealing new meanings, a number of activities the god of thieves would certainly have approved of) eventually help enhancing life.

The elusive Mary of “The Flowering of the Rod” wants Kaspar’s myrrh. *Myrrh?* Ma-her? The potential of woman, which is also and at the same time motherhood, that is to say the power of giving life? Simon, who resents Mary’s presence, is right without being conscious of it when he accuses her of being a *mermaid*. A myrrh-maid? Yet, unlike, Kaspar, Simon will not change. He does not need myrrh. In point of fact, when we propose that the poem can be seen as a palimpsest, it means that we have to understand that it is first and foremost an experiment. Words are questioned, turned into problems, and then readers discover that our culture had forgotten that some evolutions are possible. The sword is not our fate. Choice between life and death is always an option. In this respect, it could also be said that the poem is a mirror. The term is repeated six times in “The

Flowering of the Rod” in order to indicate how Kaspar suddenly starts seeing: «as in a mirror». At this juncture, it becomes clear that H.D. revises Scripture. Paul declared that he saw God «through a glass darkly» (1 *Corinthians*, 13:12, *Authorized Version*. Modern versions usually translate the phrase as «as in a mirror...») Paul tells men not to expect anything on this earth. Only when they are no longer alive will they see God face to face. H.D., as could be expected, rejects that grim logic of death. For her, we can see in the present. The word she uses is, however, most interesting. With his metaphorical *glass*, Paul obviously meant an (imperfect) lens. If that is the meaning intended by the poet (without the addition of ‘darkly’, of course), it indicates that she believes that it is possible to envision Paradise here and now, in what is probably the only life we will ever have. If, on the other hand, she wants to refer to the modern signification of *mirror*, that would imply that Kaspar only sees himself, or, rather that he has a metaphorical glimpse of the inside of his mind, of his desires and his unconscious. In other words, Paradise is a sense of direction, something we will have to build ourselves on earth without fear and without the burden of all the superstitions Christianity has traditionally forced us to accept (Cf. «resurrection is a sense of direction», F7).

Writing is always re-writing, unfolding whatever possibilities words might — indirectly of course — produce in us. Interpretation is never direct, it is not reaction, but action, creation. H.D. is perfectly clear about that necessity, especially when she rebukes John of Patmos: «I John saw. I testify; / if any man shall add // God shall add unto him the plagues» (T3).<sup>11</sup> She explains to us in which way we are to understand what she calls *The Word*: not some sort of Logos encompassing all reality as if God had once and for all invented all the words and all their meanings, and, when He was done, Creation was irrevocably finished and all that mortals like us today have to do is discover the significations hidden behind or beneath texts (religious or other). On the contrary, for the poet, words are a beginning, an invitation to interpret, *bennu*, be new, betray, be unfaithful. Producing meaning is necessarily unorthodox, «*apocryphals*» (W1). In this way, she openly prefers Jesus Christ (T3) when He proclaimed: «I make all things new» (*Revelation* 21:5), which means that maybe we can now look upon the future as fundamentally open and as something that is always to be «written». (Cf. T3). As a matter of fact, it is more than tempting to ask ourselves whether Christ was not the first empiricist when he stressed the importance of creating new relations and syntheses.

H.D.'s theory of the productivity of language is well-known. When she writes, speaking of words, «they are anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned // to hatch butterflies ... » (W29), she means that texts should not be taken at face value. Like these little boxes, words take part in numberless processes of becoming, as they become different from themselves.<sup>12</sup> The word *cryptogram* may be slightly misleading as it seems to

---

<sup>11</sup> H.D. only quotes part of the grim declaration from *Revelation* (22:18-19): «For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: / And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.»

<sup>12</sup> With her little boxes, H.D. intuits one of the basic discoveries of empiricism which Bergson — who, in his case, elected to speak of a lump of sugar — expressed very clearly when he developed his concept of duration. The human subject is necessarily part of time, and time should not be seen as a uniform, mechanical medium — often called clock time —, but as a series of differences, transformations and metamorphoses, a principle Deleuze sums up in the following way: «[A]ll the characteristics by which he [Bergson] defines it, after *Time and Free Will*, come back to this: duration is that which differs



suggest that there is something hidden (that is indeed the etymological signification of the Greek *crypt*) inside this or that word. In the above quotation, however, it is crucial to note that boxes do not release butterflies supposedly held inside them, but that they literally turn into butterflies.<sup>13</sup> In addition, H.D.'s example is revealing: as is usually the case in her poetry, a butterfly is also Psyche, the soul (Cf. T38). In the alchemy (another metaphor...) of the poem, words metamorphose themselves into butterflies which then become something spiritual in readers's minds.

There is strictly nothing hidden inside/beneath H.D.'s palimpsest. The poet would probably have maintained that it is an illusion to believe that there exists somewhere an origin or model, some kind of unified whole to be rediscovered, or, worse, imitated.<sup>14</sup> The philosophy of *Trilogy* is fundamentally non platonic. It does not rely on reminiscence or anamnesis. What matters is not recognition, but cognition: it is important to understand that there have always been other possibilities than what the present tries to impose upon us. It is true that the palimpsest retains traces of the past, but that is because reading in a palimpsestic way means producing problems, not finding ready-made answers. Reading implies being able to say: «we begin again» (T43). It may prove illuminating to recall the operations implied in Marcel Proust's theorization of the *madeleine* (in *Swann's Way*, the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*). His is also, if ever there was one, a genuinely empiricist attitude. When the narrator, now an old man, tastes his cookie which he has just dipped in a cup of tea, he is overcome with an intense feeling of joy, that is to say that he lives more fully, as he suddenly sees Combray, the little village where he spent his childhood. He obviously does not receive a realistic image of Combray as it really was in the past, but, on the contrary, he sees the village as it never was. Proust speaks of an «essence», but, no more than the American poet, the French writer is here a belated disciple of Plato. His vision shows him that life has a meaning, a sense of direction, and that it is not a meaningless repetition of the present. Direction of course is towards the future, not the past. Towards my future. You have first to return to the past in order to open yourself up to the future: «I have gone forward, / I have gone backward» (F8).<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the word/box turns into a soul, just like the worm becomes a butterfly and the grain of sand a pearl. Such is the movement of the palimpsest. It is not about repetition, but about difference: things endlessly keep opening up, unfolding and becoming

or that which changes nature, quality, heterogeneity, what differs from itself.» («Bergson 1859-1941,» *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 25-26). H.D. expresses the same point in an even more striking manner when she speaks of the words of the poem/crucible which «are melted, fuse and join / and change and alter» (T8).

<sup>13</sup> Of course, *crypt* is also the root of the word *apocryphal*. *Trilogy* possesses an apocryphal dimension when, for instance, H.D. revises and rewrites Paul's epistles according to a different logic.

<sup>14</sup> Riddel's 1969 essay apparently remains the only one to raise the question of what the issue of origins philosophically meant for H.D. His study will probably be considered non recent scholarship. Riddel, however, knew how to point out the right problems, such as the importance of chaos and heterogeneity, the implications of the «echo of an echo», and the logic consisting in hiding and revealing in the same movement. It certainly is a pity that his crucial interrogations were not pursued later in the literature devoted to *Trilogy*.

<sup>15</sup> There is no better authority on the question of time than Henri Bergson who wrote in *Matter and Memory*: «The truth is that memory does not consist in a regression from the present to the past, but, on the contrary, in a progress from the past to the present» (319). In this regard, Proust's novel is of course, in spite of its title, not about the past, but about new possible ways of looking at the future, as Deleuze very clearly demonstrates in *Proust and Signs*.

ing different from themselves. If the movement stops, that presumably means death, which explains that the key figure of *Trilogies* is the spiral, and certainly not the circle which returns to its starting point in order to repeat it exactly as it was.<sup>16</sup> In “The Flowering of the Rod,” Kaspar is thus granted a vision «through spiral upon spiral» (F33). A spiral is a succession of stages, of coils, and it obeys a completely different sort of logic: «the same — different — the same attributes, / different yet the same as before.» (T39). It is not an echo, but rather «an echo of an echo in a shell» (F28), or a multiplicity of mediations without direct connection to a supposed origin.

## 2. Of gods and objects

H.D.'s «walls», that is words, the legacy of our culture, produce references. They refer to objects and also to mythical figures. Unlike, for instance, (fully determined, ready for use) guns (Cf. W1), «the Luxor bee, chick and hare» (*ibid.*) are obviously not realistic. The poet would counter that her palimpsestic experiment with words belongs to the realm of «spiritual realism» (W35): «[...] every concrete object / has abstract value, is timeless» (W15). Seen from within an empiricist tradition, it could be said that these objects are liable to induce mental operations in readers's minds and that they urge us to raise problems, discover new possibilities of life,<sup>17</sup> «the blank pages / of the unwritten volume of the new» (T38). H.D. often uses the metaphor of alchemy, and, indeed, *Trilogies* can be considered as a authentic instance of that ancient art – a revival of what was essential in alchemy, if one prefers, - especially if one remembers that it was long synonymous with science and knowledge (until Lavoisier created modern chemistry in the 18th century). Admittedly, in some cases, alchemy referred to a materialistic activity which hoped to turn base metals like lead into gold or produce the elixir of life. That however was a deeply debased conception which only reflected the greed of a small number of individuals, when it was not some childish dream of achieving immortality. True alchemy involves forceful transformation (as is indicated by *kimeia*, violent mixing, presumably the Egyptian etymological origin of the term), but primarily it is spiritual. It above all concerns the healing and purification of man and its objective lies in discovering our best possibilities that lie hidden in ourselves. Its genuine practitioners used to sum up their art as “*laboratore, orare,*” experiment and pray. In other words, it is both physical and spiritual. Alchemists also used to characterize their activity as «*ora, lege, lege, lege, relege, labora et invenies*» («read, read, read again, pray, work, and then you will find»), to quote the venerable *Mutus Liber* from 1677. There is no better description of the task awaiting the reader of *Trilogies*.

In the poem, objects and mythical figures are always plural. They are never seen as wholes, and they never exhibit a predetermined identity. More than objects, they consist

<sup>16</sup> There are some interesting remarks on that subject in Nathalie Lucas, «Cercles ou spirale? Topologie deleuzienne de *L'Enfer* de Dante», in Vladimir Milisavljevic et Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc (dir.), *Deleuze et la violence*, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> As Deleuze has repeatedly shown, when an empiricist approach takes into consideration the question of literary texts, it always consciously or not adopts a position akin to Friedrich Nietzsche's: «There is as much invention, reflection, boldness, despair and hope here as in the voyages of great navigators; and, to tell the truth, these are also voyages of exploration in the most distant and perilous domains of life.» *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, translation borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 101).

in processes, as if the text's main function was to induce a series of metamorphoses, or alchemical transformations, in the minds of its readers. In this respect, it is particularly true to say that H.D. seems to have rediscovered on her own the basic intuitions of empiricism which have nothing to do with other more traditional approach of reality like, for instance, that of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for which every thing has its "proper" unity and identity and reality is seen in terms of genus and species by means of categories such as essence, quantity, relations, numerical time, space, action, passion or cause.

In *Trilogy*, objects and mythical figures are intrinsically bound up with space.<sup>18</sup> In order to understand their importance, it is crucial to see that H.D. approaches space from a temporal position, more or less in the same manner as, with her concept of the palimpsest, she temporalizes words. Just like language, H.D.'s space is never static. On the contrary, it is plural and always caught in series of processes of becoming. That is precisely the lesson that Kaspar (the man who liked «hedges and fences and fortresses», F34) learns through his confrontation with Mary (the woman who opens doors) in "The Flowering of the Rod." Walls have no doors (Cf. W1), and yet the poet's (and presumably the reader's) tasks is to discover doors, even «secret doors» (W30) in order to access what is beyond, a shrine most often, such as the one with the charred tree flowering again in an old garden-square (F20), something that might be called a capacity — if not for real miracles, — at least for wonder.<sup>19</sup> In this typical example of 'spiritual realism', the door is in truth in our minds. Kaspar remembers that he is a nomad. The reader is also a nomad. Anybody can be a nomad: «We can say of the nomads, following Toynbee's suggestion: they do not move. They are nomads by dint of not moving, not migrating, of holding a smooth space that they refuse to leave, that they leave only in order to conquer and die. Voyage in place: that is the name of all intensities, even if they also develop in extension. To think is to voyage... » (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 352).<sup>20</sup> At bottom, as often with H.D., there is always a choice: sword or word, death or life, or, as an empiricist like Deleuze would say, *logos* or *nomos*.<sup>21</sup> *Logos* is of course more than the *Word*, it means that language and its meanings are given once and for all, and that they will always represent the Law for us. In fact, *Logos* always implied a conception of space that is unified and centralized. On the other hand, the *nomad's nomos* (another false etymology...) harkens back in Greek to Homer's open space characterized by a non-ordered distribution of singularities. It can indeed only be a true empiricist nomad who maintains: «we know no rule / of procedure, // we are voyagers, discoverers / the not-known, // the unrecorded; / have no map» (W43).

---

<sup>18</sup> This essay owes a lot to the very suggestive essay by Mary M. DeShazer, "Teaching H.D.'s *Trilogy* from Transnational Perspectives." DeShazer rightly stresses the importance of space, border-crossing and hybridization, as well as of interpretation, translation and transcription in the poem.

<sup>19</sup> It should be without saying that this approach will be possible as long as all the walls have not been completely annihilated. «To Uriel, no shrine, no temple / where the red-death fell, // no image by the city-gate» (T7). If Uriel, the god of War, wins, there won't be any doors or gates left, let alone no shrine, no city, no representations, no process of transformation, and of course no life left.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari are referring to Arnold Toynbee's monumental *A Study of History*. See especially the abridged edition, 169. They add: «The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another.» (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 419). In other words, the nomad is the sign of an attitude: he/she is always mentally «*inter*», between, in the middle, he/she is the one who constitutes disjunctive syntheses between heterogeneous singularities.

<sup>21</sup> On the implications of the opposition between *logos* and *nomos*, see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 309.

Perhaps the greatest figure exemplifying the vitality of *nomos* is the omnipresent Hermes, the god of doors, of crossroads, and also the god of thieves (and, should we add, of false etymologies, of what H.D. calls «a little joke» (W9)?) What if the only way of arriving at the truth was cheating, thinking apocryphally, constructing disjunctive syntheses, instead of paying lip service to «sterile logic, trivial reason» (W30)? It is probably justified to say that H.D.'s ideal conception of what space could be is encompassed in Kaspar's split-second vision of Atlantis (Cf. F32). If the magus looks towards the past, it is to try to go before the stultifying (understand, orthodox) images of Paradise which alienate our minds. The true dimension of his vision lies in the future, in a possible future different from the past and the present. In other words, *Trilogy's* Atlantis cannot be seen as a repetition of a preexisting city. (To begin with, the real, historical Atlantis never existed). It is not a promised land. Promised land are always already defined, perfectly enclosed and by definition exclude all of those who do not belong to a chosen or 'elected' people (usually 'chosen' by itself, or by its leaders or its privileged members).<sup>22</sup> In the poem, the city is first defined through its spatial connectivity: it is a meeting place for land and sea (the conscious and the unconscious, if we suppose that Freud is somewhere behind H.D.?, or, should we say, a locus synonymous with the unending movement of life and fertility with «a sound as of many [breaking?] waters» [F32] that symbolically accompany the Wise Man's new birth?). What apparently matters for Kaspar is that «he saw the ships and the sea-roads crossing // and all the rivers and bridges and dwelling-houses» (*ibid.*). Secondly, this ideal Atlantis is a place where people actually live with their houses (homes?) and hearth-stones, which makes it a radically different place from John's New Jerusalem, a singularly empty-looking kind of paradise. The reader understands that the force and the vitality of the city is that it is not unified characterized as it is with its absence of a center and its proliferation of houses, bridges and «inner gardens». It is a plurality constantly opening itself. The garden is inside the city? Is H.D. rewriting the Bible? Should we build our paradises here and now?

The question needs to be asked, for, if there is something which her poem rejects, it is undeniably the New Jerusalem of *Revelation* (see T2). Unlike Kaspar's image of Atlantis, John of Patmos's vision is entirely self-contained, «four-square», «reserved by rule and rite.» It is a perfect cube (like the earlier «House» built by Solomon in *1Kings* 6:20, «twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof») and it clearly needs to be seen as a repetition of the main dogmas of Hebrew and Christian culture (with its twelve pillars a perfect reflection of the twelve tribes of Israel and also of Christ's twelve apostles). Essentially, the new Jerusalem seems to be exactly like the old Jerusalem... It has always already been 'written', described, anticipated, and, worse, what characterizes it is that there is «no need of the sun / nor moon to shine». (It could be noted that *Revelation* carefully excludes the sea, associated with chaos, other possibilities, apocryphal new beginnings, which also makes the New Jerusalem strikingly different from Kaspar's Atlantis). For John, time is arrested, without any circulation of

---

<sup>22</sup> Some readers will surely be reminded of Paul Klee's enigmatic pronouncement: «*Uns trägt kein Volk*» (We are missing a people). It is necessarily «a» people with an indefinite article, since it is in no way pre-defined. In other words, it would be wrong to look upon our future as something already written. When there is division and suffering, there is no people, no (true) community as yet. Perhaps (perhaps, because it is not determined or teleological, it is not the repetition of anything belonging to the present), a new people, a new sense of community will one day appear.

any kind and, consequently, the outside world is absolutely not necessary for his ideal City which is entirely motionless.

At that point, the poet suggests that it would perhaps be a better idea to replace John's Jerusalem with an octahedron (T2). H.D. does not elaborate. Are we supposed to consider that figure (for it undeniably is a figure supposedly possessing a series of possibilities) as an invitation to readers to imagine an alternative objective for mankind? Apparently, an octahedron's potential is everything that John's New Jerusalem is not: it is not motionless, not final, not orthodox. In other words, it seems to be at the same time under-determined (H.D. says nothing about it apart from naming it) and over-determined as it belongs to a long occult tradition (perhaps because it is made up of two pyramids, another over-determined figure with its myriad mystical associations). It is often called a 'platonic' solid, but it is clear that for H.D. it is no more platonic than Marcel Proust's «essences». One may, for instance, imagine that what is important about the octahedron is the fact that it is impossible to see all of its angles at the same time (one will always remain invisible). An octahedron would then be an instance of multiplicity, a bundle of possibilities allowing for a free, aleatory circulation of light, of temporalities, of meaning between its numerous angles, a notion which the poet specifically expresses in the third section of *Trilogy*: «a curious square cut and set so that the light // broke as if from within; the reflecting inner facets / seemed to cast incalculable angles of light» (F28). In short, one cannot grasp an octahedron. It is above all a catalyst and an open, unpredictable source of intensity.

To all intents and purposes, the same philosophy seems to be at the core of the vision of the Lady in "Tribute to the Angels": «we see her stare past a mirror / through an open window». (T30). The Lady appears to be a figure of complexity. As a matter of fact, the whole passage makes the point that she must on no account be fixed and immobilized into some traditional image. She is pure potential and pure multiplicity. In addition, the meaning of these two lines is doubly undecidable: Who is looking past that mirror (we? her?) and who is looking through the open window (*ditto*)? What is significant is that gazes are irretrievably divergent and, in the last analysis, 'we' will never know what she is looking at (or is it us who will never know what we are looking at, past the figure of the Lady?) The object of the gaze is open (like the window) and the movement is not teleological, and indeed, further down in the poem, she will be described as carrying a book displaying «the blank pages / of the unwritten volume of the new» (T38). As in Kaspar's spiral, the vision has nothing to do with a process of repetition of what is already known, in so far as it provides no direct link between the spectators and the unspecified, as yet unwritten, object of the vision. In addition, there is no narcissism involved as the Lady does not look at herself, but «past the mirror». At bottom, what matters is that she is here. Like the octahedron, she acts as a kind of catalyst and represents a source of energy inviting us to look farther afield than we are used to. Interestingly, the Lady appears together with «the phosphorescent face / of my little clock» (T26): time opens itself enabling us to free ourselves from an alienating present/presence. Essentially, what the poem tells us is that there are other possibilities than war, fear and death, and accordingly we need to look past that door and that window and enter new dimensions of space.

More specifically, in *Trilogy*, space is made up of objects and people. We will consider objects first. What matters once again is the mental operations brought to bear upon these objects. In particular, speaking of value implies that an element of choice is always taken into consideration. More than choice between this or that object, the problem is

rather to determine what sort of choice a given object entails. To summarize this point, it is to be expected that H.D. believes that most of the objects selected in the poem are at the service of life. It is also important to note that in *Trilogy* objects are doubly plural. On the one hand, the same object proliferates and disseminates. There are always others like it, «the same—different—the same attributes, / different yet the same as before» (T39), which seems to suggest that an object does not have a unity. It keeps reappearing in another form in different religious and geographical contexts. Henri Bergson would have said that the past is the cosmos, that is to say the totality of human culture and that we often overlook that it is not inside ourselves but that we are inside it. It could almost be said that, if H.D.'s religion is polytheistic, her objects belong to the same logic of multiplicity as her gods and goddesses. On the other hand, a given object is always caught in a process of becoming. It transforms itself. Following Simondon's *L'Individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, Deleuze reminds us that that is one of the key components of a true empiricist approach to things: not molds or essences, but modulations and unceasing variations. Time is at the heart of objects and, if an object remains the same, that only means that one hasn't looked at it in a temporal manner. We have taken that object for granted with its supposed unity and fixity, and the problem is not the object, but ourselves and the fact that we have forgotten the values of life and that we have unwittingly allowed ourselves to become alienated. In this respect, H.D. would contend, if we wish to promote life and fertility, it is important to understand that all objects should be submitted to an alchemical process whereby they become different from themselves.

Without overly simplifying, it could be said that the reader encounters three main categories of objects in *Trilogy*: gems or jewels, rods and trees and similar objects, and boxes and jars and similar objects. To begin with, H.D.'s jewels are not made of gold. The poet carefully avoids any materialistic conceptions of alchemy. What matters is the spiritual and not the commercial value attached to the jewel. It is essential to remember that the jewels are part of a palimpsest: they are gems, a word whose Latin etymology *gemma* is of course *jewel*, but also *bud*... The poem is indeed about life, time, fertility, and possibilities of life. More generally, the plurality of gems/jewels in the pages of the poems are caught in numerous processes of metamorphoses. It starts with the grain of sand in the shell/heart in "The Walls Do Not Fall" and continues with the gem(s) of "Tribute to the Angels." As a matter of fact, it is impossible to decide whether "Tribute" is about one or several jewels, any more than it is possible to tell if it is produced or transformed in the crucible where it is purified and where it loses its bitter quality. In both cases, it seems fair to say that it is both. The object is important, not in itself, but for its value: «what do you offer / to us who rebel?» (T9). As the poem points out, the color of the jewel raises a problem. A small list of possibilities is offered without any satisfactory solution being reached. The stone appears to be multi-colored, another way of saying that no proper color can be attributed to it. In fact, the poem repeatedly stresses that it is «opalescent», a word which means either that it refers to an opal (a specific kind of gem) or, more probably, that it is iridescent. In that case, one may suppose that what characterizes it is that it is at the same time white and not white and that it constantly changes colors. In the same way as it is a multiplicity of jewels, it is also a plurality of colors. It (they?) cannot be possessed, classified – the only suggestion we find in the poem is that it could be an *agate*, probably because of the pun on a *gate*... – or pinned down. It is (they are?) constantly opening up itself and opening doors to the readers, it is thus basically a bundle of possibilities whose only finality is to represent an effect. In this respect, the key passage is: «I want to minimize thought, // concentrate on it / till I shrink, // dematerialize / am

drawn into it.» (T14). The 'meaning' of the self is ultimately that it has no name, no color, and no meaning, apart from the metamorphosis it may possibly induce in the reader. The poem/palimpsest is also a crucible and reading it is akin to becoming purified and getting rid of one's old self, in the same way as the pearl is produced inside the shell: «you beget, self-out-of-self» (W4). I am being transformed as the jewel is being transformed and as I lose the artificial, superficial unity of my self.

Secondly, rod-like objects conform to the same underlying logic. In the same way as a jewel may be considered for its financial worth, rods may be symbols of power, and especially male power. Without unduly stressing the phallic shape of these objects, it is obvious that, in our cultures, power is very often seen as a masculine prerogative. *Trilogy* offers that rods may exhibit another type of value: «Let us, however, recover the Sceptre, / the rod of power» (W3). They may also represent spiritual possibilities and exert a healing power. In the poem, their dissemination originates from a large number of cultural and mythological areas. They also keep transforming themselves at the same time as they display a healing power. The oldest instance of them is Thoth's cross followed by Hermes's caduceus: «Hermes took his attribute / Leader-of-the-dead from Thoth // and the T-cross becomes caduceus» (T33). Here again, H.D. departs from a monotheistic, Judeo-Christian orthodoxy when she rewrites *Genesis*: snakes can be synonymous with death, which makes them symbols of evil, but, if one chooses to look at them differently, they may also represent life. As is customary with the poem, the reader's task is to choose between differing values. A logic of life would point out that Hermes's caduceus was made up of a rod intertwined with two serpents. The image is not explicit in the poem, but readers are at liberty to unfold its implications: the two snakes intertwined may stand for the balance between life and death, the vertical rod can also be seen as a link between earth and heaven, etc. Hermes, the god of crossroads, is always literally in the middle. Humans then choose and that is what the poem stresses. In point of fact, snakes must be seen as inherently ambivalent if readers decide to take their characteristics into consideration. They unite life and death: they die (slough their skins) in order to be reborn (like the phoenix, the *bennu* / 'be new' bird, or Christ on the Cross, or the Nile in Ancient Egypt). In other words, serpents are associated with death, but, in another tradition, they also imply possibilities of life. Choice here again is the problem facing us.

Trees constitute another category of rod-like objects in the poem. Like gods, they also proliferate, showing once again that one should not be looking for an origin or some centralized source of power. They are, for instance, that tree, «an ordinary tree / in an old garden-square» (T20) «an old tree / such as we see everywhere» (T22). New possibilities of life do not follow a (transcendent?) model, they only urge us to insist upon our singularities and our differences. What matters is the here and now, as well as the future which is, by definition, unpredictable and yet unwritten. In this respect, trees have their own specific manner of addressing the question of value and that of choice that underpins it. The logic they imply is basically the same, it is a logic of unpredictability: one encounters trees that are dead as well as trees that look dead but that are actually still alive, «now bourgeoning // with flowers» (T36). It has apparently to do with space: Uriel, the angel of war, has not (yet?) fully destroyed all the walls and all the trees. Uriel represents complete annihilation, the consequence of uniformity, that is nothingness, as opposed to chance which makes it possible for a gap to appear in a wall and, lo, we discover a proof of life that continues.

Trees in *Trilogy* are also seen as multiple in so far as it is impossible to determine the species they belong to. The interrogation runs through "Tribute to the Angels": «was it

may-tree or apple?» (T19). The word *or* indicates clearly that, if the poem has a meaning, it has to be constructed in the minds of its readers who have to choose, decide what values they actually want. For H.D., there will never be one single interpretation of reality. For instance, if one decides in favor of alchemy, palimpsestic logic and possibilities of life, the tree may be a *may-tree*, another word for *hawthorn*, a tree traditionally possessing healing connotations (at least, in all dictionaries of symbolism without any exception), but also literally a tree blossoming in May, heralding spring and the rebirth of nature, not forgetting that May is traditionally the month of the Virgin Mary, a mother goddess who is one of the numerous figures of the Lady in *Trilogy*. Alternately, it may also be an apple-tree, defined as the “Tree of Life” by the poet (F11) in the poet’s revisionist approach to Scripture. The interpretation of the Bible was wrong, it needs to be completely revised and rewritten in the light of other mythologies: the tree in Genesis was not the source of evil and death. On the contrary, it is a symbol of life and fertility. In other words, what matters is not the numerous trees in H.D.’s poems, or those we can see in our own environments, but the way we look upon them. Let us be conscious of the values behind our vision, the poet tells us, and let us turn our sense of vision into a Vision.

In addition to rods, caduceus and trees, it is important to mention «Thoth, Hermes, the stylus, / the palette, the pen, the quill endure, // though our books are a floor / of smouldering ash under our feet» (W9). Whether Thoth existed is irrelevant. What matters is that he invented writing and bequeathed it to us, or, rather, that texts, just like walls, are still here today, making it possible to us to access the memory of our culture. There is then not just one possibility open to us and we need not be the prisoners of a one-dimensional present, since we will always be able to discover a multiplicity of values from which to choose if we unfold the possibilities implicated in words. It is thus especially important, as the third part of *Trilogy* spells out, to remember that a rod can be a rood (same etymology). Of course, there is always something at stake when palimpsestic logic comes into play. Values have to be discriminated, choices must be made. Ultimately, what the meaning of Christianity ultimately is for us has to do with what our interpretation of the Cross will be: crucifixion, death, as is the tradition and the omnipresent symbolism in the Western world (“The-place-of-a-skull”, F22), *or* resurrection, life always returning? *Or...* The choice is this or that particular reader’s in his or her specific contexts. For H.D., there was no hesitation, she decided for “the Flowering of the Rod.”

Finally, apart from gems/jewels and rod-like objects, the third type of objects that readers of *Trilogy* have to make sense of are boxes and jars and such like containers. Once again, no more than was the case with outwardly phallic rod-like objects, what matters is not the object *per se*, its outward appearance, but its effects, the way it raises problems and sets into motion operations in readers’s minds. H.D.’s jars and boxes are all to be seen as equivalent to so many wombs or crucibles giving birth to life, or, more accurately, making the advent of new life always possible. They all follow the logic of “little boxes, conditioned // to hatch butterflies” (W39). If one has chosen life as the key value, the object comes out of the box/crucible/womb/jar qualitatively different from what it was: a box (in point of fact, box refers to words) symbolically becomes something spiritual. (This essay will return to the problem of the jars below when the object/non object *myrrh* will be discussed in detail). The main instance of that type of container, however, is the series of shells to be found in “The Walls Do Not Fall” and briefly in “The Flowering of the Rod.” Shells act according to the principle of the alchemical crucible: They help a grain become a pearl, which can of course be a “pearl-of-great-price” (W4) like the one mentioned by *Matthew* 13:45-49. H.D.’s vision, however, is once



again unorthodox from a Christian point of view. She merely says that value is being created (symbolically, “great price”) and that, in the last analysis, value depends upon readers, a point she explicitly develops when she explains that Kaspar hears «the echo / of an echo in a shell» (F33) as memory connects him/us with all the references of human culture, the vital questions that were asked, the directions that were proposed, so that he can now construct a vision of life. The same is true when the grain is dropped into a human heart (Cf. W25) so that life will then grow out of it. Here again, H.D. rewrites Scripture (*Luke* 13:31-32) when she maintains that “*the least of all seeds*” (F10) is “the seed of a lily” (F10). H.D. does not so much objects to the grain of mustard of which Jesus spoke than suggests (“if you will”, F10) that lilies might be a better example, if only because that flower “having flowered, // will flower again” (F10). Life never stops, “if you will”...

Thirdly, the human figures in the poem share the same basic quality as objects and space: they are not fixed entities. They must on no account be seen as wholes, but as multiplicities without a unity. Like rod-like objects or womb-like containers, they belong to our cultural memory which needs to be palimpsestically reclaimed. For readers, they too represent the revelation of a vision, a problem, as well as possibilities of life. My self is not a given. It is open-ended and always to be constructed anew. In other words, the poem points out a fundamental alternative for readers: either I believe that my self is a ready-made whole or I accept that ‘I’ (whatever that word means) am part of a series of endless processes of becoming. When these processes are stopped, I become alienated, I am the prisoner of conformity and of an artificial and superficial image of myself. H.D. intuitively rediscovers one of deepest intuitions of David Hume which is still at the core of any empiricist approach: the self is a fiction in which I (consciously or not) choose to believe, that is to say which I take for granted. (Let us not forget our palimpsestic methodology: the etymology of *granted* is the Latin *credere*, believe...) If one, however, chooses becoming and transformations, I need all those human figures conjured up by *Trilogy*. It would be more accurate to say that more than human, they are mythological references whose sole function is to point to problems. Put differently, it would be correct to say that, at bottom, reading the poem means problematizing my own self as well as reality.

Perhaps, H.D. finds herself very close to someone like Friedrich Nietzsche (admittedly not a confessed empiricist, but whose philosophical presuppositions interestingly never contradicted the most essential principles of empiricism). Can we not consider that Nietzsche offers a striking echo to H.D.’s poem when he uttered his famous: «Every name in history is I...?» (letter to Jakob Burckhardt, January 5, 1889, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 347). His problem was the nature of that ‘I’. Is it the sum of all my puny psychological worries with their human, too-human concerns, or is it not something more radical, a kind of delirium in which my ego is made up of a variation of all the proper names belonging to the culture in which I live? «There is no Nietzsche-the-self, professor of philology, who suddenly loses his mind and supposedly identifies with all sorts of strange people; rather, there is the Nietzschean subject who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the names of history: “every name in history is I...” It is not a matter of identifying with various historical personages, but rather of identifying the names of history with zones of intensity on the body without organs; and each time Nietzsche-as-subject exclaims: “They’re me! So it’s me!” No one has ever been as deeply involved in history as the schizo, or dealt with it in this way. He con-

sumes all of universal history in one fell swoop. We began by defining him as *Homo natura*, and, lo and behold, he has become *Homo historia*.» (Deleuze, *Anti Oedipus*, 21).<sup>23</sup> In *Trilogy*, Kaspar, Isis, Astarte, the Lady, etc. are all «the same – different – the same attributes, / different yet the same as before.» (T39). They are different because they belong to a plurality of religious contexts, which means that there has never been one single god, one origin, one model, one truth which somehow humans are supposed to follow. At the same time, they share one crucial characteristic: they are all caught in time and in processes of metamorphoses and they all promote one crucial value: life.

Kaspar is a good case in point. On the face of it, he appears to be a fully determined personality. *Trilogy* even adds (invents...) a large number of details which are not present in *Matthew* (The Gospel only mentions an unspecified number of anonymous Wise Men from the East who presented Jesus with three gifts, hence the popular belief ever since that there were... three Magi). He is, however, described as the lesser of the three (F42), being in this way a minor figure, probably more liable than Balthazar and Melchior to evolve. The poem supposes that nothing is certain about him and that 'he' may have been several of the famous «names of history» with the possibilities, the new beginnings they represent: a Chaldean, not an Arab, Balthazar, Melchior, or even the baby Jesus, or an Angel in disguise, or an old lover of Mary Magdalene, or God (Cf. F20). As usual with H.D., the use of the conjunction *or* places the onus on the reader who has then to construct his or her vision of what is possible for himself or herself.

As could be expected, most of the other mythological figures of the poem, however, are female. They are all multiplicities as if to show that religions cannot be limited to one single option. The Egyptian Serqet, only briefly alluded to (W34), constitutes a fairly simple example in that her plurality is only twofold. Like the scorpion, her emblem, she was the one who strangled people. She was also the goddess who cured venomous bites. In other words, being drug and poison at the same time, she imposes a choice upon the reader: which value should eventually be asserted? Will it be life or a logic of death and/or alienation? In this respect, these figures are all like «Ge-meter, De-meter, earth-mother» (F25), whose name was not really determined in Greek mythology as apparently H.D. discovered: *de* as in *demos*, people (to be invented?), or *ge* as in earth (the prefix is still to be found in present-day English in words like *geology*), and *meter*, mother? All the potentialities of her names point to the fact that she represents another instance of many mother goddesses.

«I am Mary—O, there are Marys a-plenty» (F16). Mary says it all. She appears even more a plurality than the Lady of “Tribute to the Angels,” who is mainly seen as a composite image made up of historical projections hiding what her real identity consists in, an identity only tentatively approached in the last poem of “Tribute” by means of two elusive images coordinated by the ever-present conjunction *or*, as if it was radically impossible to pin her down to one single representation. The Mary of “The Flowering of the Rod” is an even more ambiguous figure. She is Mary Magdalene, but, at the same

---

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze also explains that this is where Freud was wrong when he reduced the productions of our unconscious to trivial psychological problems. The French philosopher kept repeating that the unconscious is first and foremost about problems, and more precisely about social problems. «When the unconscious unravels into delirium (for example, in schizophrenia), it is not through daddy/mommy, but through races, tribes, and continents, history and geography — identifications drawn from the entire social field» (*Negotiations*, 144). Knowing what we know about her sessions with the «Professor», it seems safe to conclude that H.D. would probably have concurred.

time, she is also the Virgin Mary with the baby in her arms. *Stricto sensu*, Mary Magdalene in point of fact represents three different characters in the Bible: Mary from Bethany, an unnamed woman said to be a prostitute (*Luke* 7:36-50), and Mary from Magdala, the city with a tower, usually known as Mary Magdalene, as the character herself says at one point in *Trilogy* (F16). Symbolically, a virgin, a woman of easy virtue, as well as a strong woman like the tower at Magdala who seems to have been a close confidante of Christ, was present both at crucifixion and resurrection, and was the butt of the fierce jealousy of the male apostles. Who and where is Mary? Christ is said to have expelled seven demons out Mary from Magdala, an episode often seen by specialists today as a form of psychological therapy, as opposed to Simon's disease which was organic (Cf. F26). This expulsion is subjected to H.D.'s critical revision at the end of poem F33. She explains that Mary was not suffering from demons, that is to say devils, evil spirits, which would make her a sinner, dirty and impure, but rather that she harbored within herself *daemons*, a word of Greek origin pronounced exactly in the same way as *demon*... *Daemons* were gods or goddesses who possessed a healing potential and worked towards increasing life around them. Many were mother goddesses. Thus, Christ liberated Mary Magdalene's, but, as the poem implies, that did not prove sufficient. "The Flowering of the Rod," in turning negative into positive representations (another remarkable example of alchemy!), brings off Mary's second liberation.

The last stanza of F33 explains that two of the *daemons* symbolically hidden inside Mary Magdalene were Eve and Lilith. Kaspar's vision liberates them as well. They are no longer the figures traditionally reviled by Christianity that maintains that the Fall and original sin were brought about by Mary who introduced evil into the Garden of Eden. Even worse in the eyes of Christianity is Lilith who has usually been utterly repressed in so far as she represents a number of possibilities the Fathers of the Church could definitely not countenance. In apocryphal writings, she was Adam's first helpmate before the more compliant Eve replaced her. She was born at the same time as Adam out of the dust, which made her his equal, unlike Eve who was shaped later out of one of his ribs, implying that she will always be only a subsidiary part of Adam. Lilith was not afraid of using Jehovah's name. She also refused to lie underneath Adam when they had sex, symbolically proclaiming that she was in no way inferior. The poem mentions a third female figure born before Lilith. The fact that we don't know her name seems to show that she has been even more repressed, and possibly that she was some kind of mother goddess even freer and more life-giving than Eve and especially Lilith. There are also four unnamed others, presumably mother goddesses as well, and possibly part of the list: Isis, Astarte, Cyprus, and Demeter-Gemeter (Cf. F25). What is important to notice is that the list is and remains open-ended. It is not so much that the poet is trying to promote a new form of polytheism over the lethal legacy of monotheism in our western world. H.D. is not interested in religion *per se*. She would like us instead to accede to the 'dream', the 'vision', the epiphany that will perhaps some day open new possibilities of life for us.

### 3. The wall and the myrrh

«What for?» (W1). The poem explicitly poses what should be the most fundamental question for all human beings. After having seen that it was first necessary to consider the first two questions underlying H.D.'s enterprise in *Trilogy*, *how?* and then *what?*, we now have in our possession all the elements that will enable us to try to understand the poet's philosophy:

*what for?* It was first necessary to deal with methodology and then contents before we could understand what her conception of ontology was. Her answers are anything but traditional. Here again, she intuitively adopts a non teleological, non transcendent approach which is perfectly consistent with what the old tradition of empiricism consistently stressed.

*Trilogy* contains what could be called a meta-object, *myrrh*. It is, or at least appears to be, an object, and, at the same time, it is not an object, or perhaps we should say that it is more than an object. It seems to be a condensation of all that is essential for humanity. At bottom, *myrrh* is part of a very specific logic which needs to be reconstructed. As opposed, for instance, to the guns and the rails around London public squares mentioned in the first section, *myrrh* is clearly no more a “real” object than the gems, the caduceuses, or the shells and jars that crop up everywhere in the poem. It is first and foremost a word in a literary text which, when considered palimpsestically, will yield a number of associations and permit the creation of mental relations by the reader: *ma-her* (a pun) or *marra* (its authentic Hebrew etymology signifying bitter, to be purified), as well as form a fictive chain with *mer*, *mère*, etc. In fact, more than a word or some kind of mythical object, *myrrh* functions as an instance or catalyst facilitating the unfolding of new possibilities of life. At the end of the last section of *Trilogy*, with its insistence on fertility, it has come to stand for all the mythological objects present in the rest of the poem. Already, these objects do not seem to be represented as separate by the poet, as if they were all the same object metamorphosing itself. Strikingly, an effect almost of synesthesia is established in “Tribute to the Angels:” «tell me, in what other city / will you find the may-tree // so delicate, green-white, opalescent / like our jewel in the crucible?» (T17). What these objects share in common is that they produce an effect that cannot be described in terms of this or that particular object strictly speaking. Indeed, speaking of the jewel, the poet writes: «it lives, it breathes, / it gives off — fragrance? // I do not know what it gives, / a vibration that we can not name» (T13).

In addition, it should be noted that, in *Trilogy*, *myrrh* is first and foremost presented as a multiplicity. It is a «bundle of *myrrh*» (F43). Admittedly, the phrase is a Biblical collocation (Cf. *Song of Solomon* 1:13), but it is undeniable that the term *bundle* refers to an unspecified number of objects bound together. How many? By definition, a bundle cannot be counted or described, to which of course must be added the fact that *myrrh* is grammatically a no-count noun (one does not say \**one or two myrrh(s)*). It is neither zero, nor one, nor a specific number. It is of the order of the indefinite (like the determinative ‘some’). In the poem, a bundle refers to a heterogeneous assemblage without a unity which therefore cannot be ‘identified’ or grasped in a definitive way. The signification of H.D.’s *myrrh* will always remain open.

H.D. found Kaspar’s *myrrh* in the Bible, where, interestingly enough, it is a substance endowed with multiple, and possibly contradictory, functions. The Wise Men presented the new-born Jesus with it (*Matthew* 2:11). It is, however, also linked with death and two of the other Marys (the one from Bethany and the anonymous one, a Mary — *Luke* 7:37 — who, in the Bible, was probably not a Mary but who became part of the “Marys-a-plenty” — F16 — for H.D....) used it to anoint Christ’s feet with their long hair before crucifixion. Kaspar knew very well that he had to give away a second jar full of *myrrh* after the one with which he had celebrated Jesus’s birth (Cf. F41), as if he unconsciously understood that things are never finished, that death will always follow birth, and that it will then again be followed by birth. One thing at least is not ambiguous in *Trilogy*: crucifixion is important only because it leads to resurrection.

In “The Flowering of the Rod,” Mary requests the second jar of *myrrh*. At the same time, we know that she says “I shall be Mary-*myrrh*; // I am that *myrrh*-tree of the gentiles, / the heathen” (F16). She has the *myrrh*, she is the *myrrh*. The list is not finished: Mary is also the Virgin Mary traditionally holding the baby God in her arms, except that, in the poem, «the Child was not with her» (T32): she is instead holding the bundle of *myrrh* (Cf. F43). The im-

plication is logically unavoidable: If Mary is supposed to be having God in her arms, but not Jesus, and if she holding the bundle of myrrh and being myrrh herself at the same time: Mary is God and God is Mary in H.D.'s feminist revision of Christian orthodoxy. In addition, in this apocryphal vision, there is no need whatsoever for a transcendent entity outside our world. There is only our world, ourselves, and the text.

«What for» then? The «boxes, very precious» are active only «as we draw them nearer» (W24). That is precisely myrrh's fundamental role: «it brings life to the living» (W3). The text is at the service of healing, and, in other words (it should be clear by now that, in a palimpsestic approach, the main logical connective will always be *in other words...*), the poem makes it possible for a new people to be constituted, a people which possesses neither essence nor mission yet, but which will hopefully embody the important values that the poem promotes: life and fertility, endless possibilities of life.

There remains one very important detail to take into consideration: «Kaspar knew the seal of the jar was unbroken» (F43). Exactly as Kaspar's vision of Atlantis is irretrievably mediated, spiral-like, the echo of an echo, myrrh does not heal through direct contact. We have to draw nearer... There are, as it were, two separate universes: the myrrh and ourselves. In fact, even though the term as a synonym of *recondite* is not often used in English, the jar is *hermetic* in the same way as a text can be said to be *hermetic* in many languages, just like Hermes's obscure messages that had to be interpreted, translated (*inter-*) from one medium to another.. The jars are like the walls in H.D.'s poem. They have endured, they represent a starting point for us to reclaim our memory, our culture, that is to say a limitless potential that a lot of us have forgotten. What *TrilogY* tells us is that myrrh cannot be seen or grasped, it only exists in its effects, in the transformations it may bring about in readers, in the possibilities of life it reveals.

If we now try to express H.D.'s experiment with *myrrh* in a more theoretical way, it could be noted that, in her own way, she intuits a central concept of empiricist thinking. In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson called it the virtual, which he insisted should be carefully distinguished from the possible. The latter is only artificially constructed from what exists in the present and is only seen as having caused that present. The possible is only a inverted copy, resembling the present.<sup>24</sup> *TrilogY*, however, keeps warning us not to take the present and its presence for granted. On the contrary, the virtual is real, but it does not look like actuality. There are no direct connections between the two. The logic at work is spiral-like, H.D. would probably say. For Bergson, and his followers in the empiricist tradition like Gilles Deleuze, the virtual is what he calls the “pure past,” which is made up of the entirety of our human memory which will never be forgotten but will endlessly keep returning with its myriad references. An empiricist thinks in terms of problems whose solutions have constantly be invented anew. What matters is not repetition or imitation, but invention, creation, being creative: «For a potential or virtual object, to be actualized is to create divergent lines which correspond to — without resembling — a virtual multiplicity. The virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved: it is the problem which orientates, conditions, and engenders solutions, but these do not resemble the conditions of the problem.» (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 212). Let us add that Deleuze, as far as he was con-

---

<sup>24</sup> There is no denying that the use of the term *possibility* in this essay is rather unfortunate. It is, however, extremely convenient. One reason for retaining it is that it is part of the celebrated phrase used by Nietzsche, a thinker who cannot be accused of harboring a nostalgia for transcendent other-worlds which our existence should try to imitate, albeit very poorly. Everyone knows his famous expostulation, which, said in passing, expresses perfectly the purpose of H.D.'s enterprise in *TrilogY*: «If only someone could rediscover «these possibilities of life!» (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, introduction, 3.)

cerned, endeavored to develop Bergson's concept of the virtual in terms the theory of *expression* which he discovered in Spinoza's *Ethics*. The logic of expression is basically similar to that of the virtual. All objects as well as all our modes of being express God or nature, which for Spinoza was the same thing as he did not believe or take granted (*credere...*) that anything transcendent or outside our world was possible. God/nature only exists in His/its myriad effects, «different yet the same» as H.D. would put it (Cf. F39), or, if one prefers, what is expressed only exists in its expression.<sup>25</sup> It follows that expression is bound up with time: nature (just like the virtual for Bergson) endlessly unfolds itself and never stops becoming different from itself, constantly producing new relations and novel potentialities.<sup>26</sup>

H.D. seems to be fully aware of that very specific logic when she alludes to the theory of light. «And the point in the spectrum / where all lights become one, // is white and white is not no-colour, / as we were told as children, // but all-colour; / the flames mingle // and the wings meet, when we gain / the arc of perfection» (F43). This special sort of white is in fact as real or unreal as the myrrh in Kaspar's jar. It could be said that it represents one way of speaking of the virtual as it is expressed in an infinity of colors that do not look like it (including our color white which has nothing to do with that non-color/all-color 'white'). What appears to be a unity («where all lights become one») is actually a multiplicity that never stops proliferating and actualizing new shades in endless new contexts.<sup>27</sup> Mary apparently also feels it when she says about the myrrh in the hermetic jar: «Sir, it is a most beautiful fragrance, / as of all flowering things together» (F43). What we should understand is that readers are able to rediscover in human memory the most life-affirming possibilities that have ever been envisaged, beauty, perfection, what we should strive to assert in our own lives away from the values of death and war.

What characterizes myrrh is multiplicity, but also mutability, the two being inseparable. Myrrh, as we have seen, is never the same thing and change is always at the core of the problems put forward by the poem. It is only when things are no longer taken for granted that the healing process is able to begin and that usually requires a shock, a scandal (The word *skandalon* originally meant a stumbling block in Greek), that is a chance action that forces our minds to think anew and stop being the prisoners of the alienating presence of the present

---

<sup>25</sup> «The essence of substance has no existence outside the attributes that express it, so that each attribute expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence. What is expressed has no existence outside its expressions; each expression is, as it were, the existence of what is expressed.» (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 42).

<sup>26</sup> It could be pointed out that this manner of approaching language acquired a significant importance in the second half of the 20th century, and that not only in the empiricist camp. Jacques Derrida, for one, kept repeating in «Signature, Event, Context» that signs are first and foremost endowed with iterability. «Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called 'normal' functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?» (320). What matters is not their origin, whatever that is, but the potential which they possess of being interpreted in an infinity of new contexts. What should be taken into consideration is the future and not the past: how the collaboration between a series of signs and a reader permits new meaning to be created.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, an avowed empiricist like Deleuze resorts to the same metaphor in order to explain the logic of expression: «The Idea of colour, for example, is like white light which perplicates in itself the genetic elements and relations of all colours, but is actualized in the diverse colours with their respective spaces» (*Difference and Repetition*, 263).

and of its illusions. In the poem, war can thus be seen as an example of a violent symbolic crucible. The most illuminating instance, however, is to be found in “The Flowering of the Rod,” when Kaspar meets Mary. Everybody around him (men in fact...) warns him: that woman is «unmaidenly» (F13). Worse, she uncovers her hair, which, in his culture, is seen as obscene and pornographic. Her scarf suddenly falls to the ground and Kaspar starts having his vision. «[T]here was a sound as of many waters, / rivers flowing and fountains and sea-waves washing the sea-rocks» (F32). Symbolically, these waters breaking seem to accompany a new birth. Kaspar becomes a new man. He needed Mary to achieve his liberation, in order to free his self and become a Chaldean, Balthazar, Melchior, Jesus, Angel in disguise, or an old lover of Mary Magdalene, even God, that is a long plurality of possibilities, just like Mary needed him to effect the liberation of the seven *daemons* inside her, «*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*» (F33). With the redemption of these emblematic figures, our origins no longer consist in a model to follow, a neat teleological beginning represented by Jehovah and secondarily Adam — two overtly male figures. The origin is basically plural. As the Greeks and the Egyptians knew very well, monotheism means primarily the repressive power of churches and especially their leaders on the bodies and the minds of the believers. On the contrary, H.D.'s poem is made up of a multiplicity of possibilities which helps restore and celebrate our fundamental freedom.

Multiplicity and processes of becoming have of course to be interpreted. Unless the reader is utterly passive (which would be highly unlikely) or does not pay the utmost attention to the letter of the text (which certainly happens much more frequently), they induce operations in his or her mind. The poem is like the walls which did not fall and «continue to prophesy / from the stone papyrus» (W1). Writings are *skandalons* that have to be made sense of. Possible, the greatest stumbling-block in *Trilogies* has to do with what triggers Kaspar's vision in “The Flowering of the Rod.” The passage literally begs an empiricist way of thinking to be understood. When Mary's scarf drops to the floor, the Magus sees, or rather imagines that he sees three women's heads, some wearing jewels in their hair. He suddenly experiences the beginning of a vision: «in the second circlet, / a grain, a flaw or a speck of light» (F30). The problem (and it is a problem, if ever there was one...) concerns the role of the conjunction *or*, a conjunction used 81 times in that section of the poem. From a realistic point of view, Kaspar can only have seen one of these three completely different things. What it means is that the operative *or* represents the judgment of the persona of the poet, as opposed to the supposed content of the vision which makes up the predicate of the clause *Kaspar / saw these three things*. Linguistically, its action is like that of a modal verb or an adverb: he *must/may* have seen, he *perhaps* saw... The poet (*or* her persona...), however, never indicates in what manner this passage should or could be interpreted. Readers are forced to construct a relation encompassing at least two of these three things. In other words, readers produce their own visions. David Hume would say that they create one or several associations between two terms. Admittedly, this new relation has partly to do with the potentialities inherent in these terms: a grain is obviously a symbol of fertility, light is presumably conducive to vision (except that, in the next line, the light is described as «a point *or* shadow»), and a flaw strongly suggests the existence of a sort of stumbling block, implying that the jewel is not perfect, that there is a crack, a defect in it, and, if vision there is, it will be indirect and not a 'logical' continuation of the jewel or of the grain. In the last analysis, however, the relation expressing the vision will not resemble its origin. Put differently, readers have to produce something new, something not present in the poem, something as yet unwritten.

In her own manner, H.D. has rediscovered the most important component of the empiricist tradition: relations are exterior to their terms.<sup>28</sup> This principle means that there is indeed a *tabula rasa*: the subject is not a given, but it is constructed at the same time as it constructs a networks of relations (or associations) and then chooses to believe in them. Obviously, readers do not start from scratch when they embark upon a specific poem like, say, *Trilogy*. They necessarily draw upon their reading habits, their unconscious desires, or the pressure of the social contexts of which they are part. In other words, they build upon the relations they have already constructed, and then complexify them. In some cases, readers impose upon a text ready-made interpretations, relations taken from granted without their being aware that in so doing they are alienated as they only repeat interpretations which they have seen somewhere else and which look natural to them. The second part of this alternative is, however, difficult to put into play with a poem as difficult as H.D.'s.

The conjunction *or* obliges readers who confront it to invent something new to make sense of the operations it implies. In this particular instance, readers cannot resort to any kind of conventional manner of thinking. Neither readers nor objects (including such fantasies as a grain, a speck of light or even a flaw, the latter of course not in itself an object) are fixed, given essences. Gilles Deleuze will here again be of some assistance when it comes to trying to understand that other type of logic that is necessary to make sense of reality in an empiricist way: «The history of philosophy is encumbered with the problem of being (the sky is blue) and the judgment of existence (God is), which presupposes the other. But it is always the verb to be and the question of the principle. It is only the English and the Americans who have freed conjunctions and reflected on relations. [...] Substitute the *AND* for *IS*. A and B. The *AND* is not even a specific relation or conjunction, it is what which subtends all relations, the path of all relations, which makes relations shoot outside their terms, and outside everything that could be determined as Being, One or Whole.» (*Dialogues II*, Chapter «On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature, 42-43. The original quotation is of course more striking and unsettling as, in French, *EST* (is) is pronounced exactly like *ET* (and)...)»

Conjunctions of coordination, such as *and*, but also *or*, produce syntheses. In the passage under scrutiny, *or* connects contradictory elements or, at the very least, elements which are «incongruent», as H.D. would say (Cf. W32).<sup>29</sup> It could almost be argued that we are faced with a sort of complex oxymoron, which constitutes the most common sort of disjunctive synthesis, except that there are three terms involved. Something must grow out of this synthesis which links elements relatively unimportant in themselves, including a seed (like Christ's mustard seed or H.D.'s lily seed, «*the least of all seeds*» (F10)?) In the poem, nothing is endowed with a fixed identity and consequently it would be wrong to say that the jewel, or the seed, the flaw, the speck of light, or Atlantis, or Eve, Lily and the five unnamed goddesses is/are this or that, by which, we usually mean some already constructed (where? when? by whom?) reference that then prevents us from thinking in a novel way. The goddesses, how-

<sup>28</sup> If we are to believe Gilles Deleuze, that principle represents David Hume's most important pronouncement. It was rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th century by thinkers like William James, especially in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, and by Bertrand Russell, admittedly, in his case, in his attempt at renewing formal logic. Russell sums up the notion in a somewhat humorous manner: «Suppose that A and B are events, and A is earlier than B. I do not think that this implies anything in A in virtue of which, independently of B, it must have a character which we inaccurately express by mentioning B. Leibniz gives an extreme example. He says that, if a man living in Europe has a wife in India and the wife dies without his knowing it, the man undergoes an intrinsic change at the moment of her death.» (*My Philosophical Development*, 54).

<sup>29</sup> Among other noteworthy examples, we could mention the characterization of the beginning of Kaspar's vision: light *or* vibration? (Cf. F40), or the mysterious behavior of the geese at the beginning of «The Flowering of the Rod:» «satiated *or* numb with hunger» (F5). Do they actually kill themselves?



ever, are presented as freed from past shackles. The future is literally open for them (or, for that matter, for what they represent for us). In addition, the poet does not tell us what becomes of them. The same is true of the reading subject. If we accept that interpreting literary texts in a critical way helps us escape alienation, we have to conclude that the reader is not a given either. He or she is this singularity and/or that singularity and/or that other one, or then the relation that we establish between these singularities and it is that series of relations that temporarily constitutes a subject that is always becoming different from itself.

#### 4. The peril of the poem

Was H.D. a complete poet? Her interests were unquestionably far ranging. It would, however, be rash to answer. Nothing and no-one are ever complete. The idea of completeness is an illusion, one those illusions H.D. set out to question in her critical, basically unorthodox practice of poetry. In *Trilogy*, more than WW2, theology or mythology, what she is concerned with is what a subject can do:<sup>30</sup> not only what the logic, the operations, the syntheses that that are produced by a subject, but above all else the network of various operations that produce that subject, and this is precisely in that respect that she can be read according to an empiricist approach. As Deleuze aptly reminds us: «I have always felt that I am an empiricist . . . [My empiricism] is derived from the two characteristics by which Whitehead defined empiricism: the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativity)». (*Dialogues II*, Preface, VII).<sup>31</sup>

It is also important to recall that the term *empiricism* comes from *experience/experiment* and, from an etymological point of view, *experiment* signifies trying to acquire knowledge by means of a thorough trial. The word *peril* interestingly shares the same Latin origin *experiri*, which comes from a Greek term meaning *passing through*. There is no denying that *Trilogy* is a violent, perilous text. Readers are warned: reading it means entering a crucible whose heat is liable to transform them. (Put differently, H.D.'s supposed empiricism is also a pragmatics). Producing syntheses, especially disjunctive syntheses in order to make sense of the numerous stumbling-blocks accumulated in the pages of the poem, forces the reading subject to invent new types of logic, new ways of establishing relations between mythological references, and, in the process, helps him or her to discover a fundamental sense of becoming that is the hallmark of his or her freedom.

H.D. perfectly intuited that the human subject is not a fixed, united whole. Trying to recognize ready-made roles we are supposed to play is a sure sign of alienation. In the logic of the poem, we could say that taking for granted a given unity and/or identity *in*

---

<sup>30</sup> “*Quid Corpus possit? Nemo hucusque determinavit*». «What can the body do? As yet, no-one has fully ascertained it» (*Ethics*, Book III, scolium of proposition 2). The question was essential for Spinoza. In *Trilogy*, H.D. kept – exactly like Sigmund Freud, but in her own personal manner – trying to ask a similar question about the human subject.

<sup>31</sup> The influence of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* on Deleuze and more generally 20th century empiricism cannot be overstated. To a large extent, Whitehead's philosophy can be considered as a warning against abstract universals and generalizations which at bottom are always simplifications we are led to take for granted. On the contrary, when trying to account for reality as it really is, one should always start from the processes of becoming involving actual multiplicities that will never be united.

*fine* boils down to being “subjected” to a social context in which we are only slaves. It is a logic of war and death. On the contrary, a subject can be seen as a structure which is always in the process of being constructed, that is to say as an assemblage of multiplicities, body parts, historical or mythical names, etc. It is only in this second approach that we can speak of fertility and of possibilities of life. In other words, H.D.’s palimpsestic logic is necessary because it reminds us that texts — or our lives for that matter — are not just mere surfaces, but they are multi-faceted, that we live in time, and that the past, memory, our human culture are always there ready to be unfolded. When it is not an alienated self, understand a pure passive repetition of the same, the subject proves to be an ever-evolving process trying to achieve a temporary definition of itself between the infra-human (sand, snake, shells, etc.) and the supra-human (Venus, mother goddesses, etc.) What H.D. rediscovered is that evoking the past means and only means looking at the future, or, more to the point, writing our future. «[W]e are voyagers, discoverers / of the not-known, // the unrecorded; / we have no map; // possibly we will reach haven, / heaven» (W43). Possibly... It is time we left the last word to the poem, by which of course we mean the first word... «We begin again» (T43).

## 6. References

- Bergson, Henri. *Matière et mémoire. Essai de philosophie posant le problème du rapport entre la matière et l'esprit*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1896. *Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relation of Body and Spirit*, New York: Cosimo, 2007.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Le Bergsonisme*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966. *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books, 1988.
- . *Différence et répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968. *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- . *L'Île déserte et autres textes: textes et entretiens. 1953-1974*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002. *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004.
- . *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- . *Logique du sens*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969. *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- . *Nietzsche et la philosophie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 1983.
- . *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- . *Proust et les signes*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1964. *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- . *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. New York: Zone Books, 1990.
- Deleuze, Gilles et Félix Guattari. *L'Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Éditions de Minuit, 1972. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Viking, 1977.

- . *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit (collection "Critique"), 1980. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles et Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1977. *Dialogues with Claire Parnet*. London: Althone Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Signature, Event, Context" in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- DeShazer, Mary K. "Teaching H.D.'s *Trilogy* from Transnational Perspectives." *Approaches to Teaching H.D.'s Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Annette Debo and Lara Vetter, New York: MLA, 2011.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Edmunds, Susan. *Out of Line: History, Psychoanalysis, & Montage in H.D.'s Long Poems*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Gubar, Susan. "The Echoing Spell of H.D.'s *Trilogy*." *Contemporary Literature*, 19, Spring 1978, 196-218.
- H.D.. *Trilogy*. Ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, New York: New Directions, 1973.
- Holy Bible, The: King James Version, Quatercentenary Edition*. Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. 1748. Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Ed. Ralph Perry, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1912.
- Klee, Paul. "Übersicht und Orientierung auf dem Gebiet der bildnerischen Mittel und ihre räumliche Ordnung." *Vortrag aus Anlaß einer Bilderausstellung im Kunstverein zu Jena*. 1924. Reprinted in *Über die moderne Kunst*. Bern: Bümplitz, 1949.
- Locke, John. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 1690. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924.
- Milisavljevic, Vladimir et Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc (dir.), *Deleuze et la violence*. Paris: Édition EuroPhilosophie/Institut de Philosophie et de Théorie Sociale, coll. Champs&contreChamps, 2012.
- Mutus Liber: L'Alchimie et son Livre muet*, réimpression première et intégrale de l'édition originale de La Rochelle, 1677. Paris: Pauvert, 1967.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*. 1873. Werke in drei Bänden. Band 3. München 1954. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1996.
- . *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. 1913-1927. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1954. *Remembrance of Things Past*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1949.

- Riddel, Joseph N. "H. D. and the Poetics of 'Spiritual Realism'". *Contemporary Literature*, 10/4, Autumn, 1969, 447-473.
- Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959.
- Simondon, Gilbert. *L'Individu et sa genèse psycho-biologique*. Vendôme: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964.
- Spinoza Baruch. Baruch. *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*. 1677. *Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Toynbee, Arnold. *A Study of History. Abridgement of Volumes I-VI*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*. Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the Session 1927-1928, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929.