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Navigating *Palimpsest's* Sea Garden: H.D.'s Spiritual Realism

Mari Anne Murdock

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Navigating *Palimpsest*'s Sea Garden: H.D.'s Spiritual Realism

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H.D.'s novel *Palimpsest* has often been analyzed using psychoanalytic theories due to her relationship with Sigmund Freud and his work. However, her own approach to the science of psychoanalysis reveals that she often complemented her scientific understanding with her syncretic religious beliefs, a perspective she referred to as "spiritual realism," which suggests that analysis with a spiritual nuance may provide a deeper understanding of the novel's intended purpose. Postsecular theory makes for a useful lens by which to analyze *Palimpsest*'s treatment of reintegrating spiritual knowledge into Freud's secular understanding of the modern world by providing the benefits of such a paradigm shift. Because H.D. adopted the ocean as her metaphor for spirituality, eternity, and transcendence, integrating oceanic and archipelagic theories also help to analyze H.D.'s intentions for spiritual realism by providing the characteristics which illustrate her ritualistic writing process and its transformative experiences.

My reading of the novel using postsecular and oceanic/archipelagic theories reveals that *Palimpsest* has more significance beyond a psychoanalytic treatment of H.D.'s own traumatic past. Instead, H.D.'s reasons for breaking down secular constructs of reality—such as time, space, memory, and individuality—emerge, showing that as an artistic modernist, she was attempting to outline the spiritual solution to modernity's weaknesses and secularity's limitations. By providing examples of characters' poetic communions with eternity, *Palimpsest* explores the spiritual potential within humanity's palimpsestic multi-layered consciousness, expressing how that which can transcend time, space, limits of communication, and personal failures can be discovered inward through outward spiritual connection to the eternal. This reading also provides justifications for H.D.'s decisions to write poetic prose novels, an answer to the alienating secular approaches to psychoanalytic knowledge that denied her identity as a poet-oracle, revealing her intent to share spiritual realism's transformative power despite its secular critics.

Keywords: H.D., *Palimpsest*, Freud, Modernism, Archipelagic Studies, Oceanic Studies, Postsecular Studies

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Introduction

The imagist poet H.D. wrote three “cycles” of novels (titled *Magna Graeca*, *Madrival*, and *Borderline*) during her writing career. Though many scholars of modernism debate the clarity of her intentions for these projects, they agree her prose largely includes autobiographical contemplations, often approaching these works from a psychoanalytic basis that hinges on Sigmund Freud’s influence. Indeed, Freud’s influence abounds in much of her work as H.D. had the opportunity to be his analysand and pupil (1933-1934), and her interest in psychoanalysis can also be traced as early as 1909 (McCabe 133). This date corresponds closely with the publication of Freud’s 1908 essay “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” in which he proposes that literary works of art act as psychological manifestations, an idea that directly informs the basis and language of H.D.’s essay *Notes on Thought and Vision* (written in 1919 and published in 1982), a text often looked to as a more formal record of her poetics and writing process.¹ In fact, Dianne Chisholm argues, “Freud’s entry into H.D.’s writing effectively displaces her imagism and informs her autobiography,” going so far as to say that “there is no H.D. without Freud” (2).

H.D.’s novel *Palimpsest* (1921), the first novel of the *Magna Graeca* cycle, often undergoes the same psychoanalytic treatment. To many scholars, the novel and its three poet protagonists (Hipparchia, Raymonde Ransome, and Helen Fairwood) act as H.D.’s psychological expressions. Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that the novel is actually a “palimpsest of its author’s psyche,” which represents “a psychodynamic splitting and projection of identity into three different directions” (*Penelope’s Web* 238; *Psyche Reborn* 29). This “releasing” of herself into a “division of selves and consciousness” could function as a means to rewrite her trauma from World War I, as Deborah Kelly Kloepfer believes (186). It could also function as an in-depth, Hellenistic exploration of a complex consciousness’ psychopathology, as Robert Duncan

suggests in *The H.D. Book* (89). On the other hand, Adalaide Morris sees the novel as a poetic voyage through the “borderland of consciousness,” to use H.D.’s own words, “where the rhythms of active rationality recede” (*How to Live/What to Do* 37).

Despite the abundant parallels between Freud’s work and H.D.’s prose, this link between them can also become problematic since as a poet and even as a modernist, she was not beholden to the rules of the modern science of psychoanalysis. Her inconsistent, or probably a more appropriate term would be unrestricted, approach to this science makes drawing direct lines difficult. Kloepfer admits H.D.’s psychoanalytic theories in *Palimpsest* operate “out of a private lexicon, the terms of which are variously evolving and abandoned. The distinctions she makes ... are at certain times ... essential; at other times she rather casually conflates them, and it is not always clear when the terms are interchangeable” (194). Friedman explains these variations with gender dynamics, pointing to Freud’s feminine difference, citing *Palimpsest*’s preface written by Robert McAlmon (*Palimpsest*’s 1926 publisher), which reads, “HD’s [sic] intellect is more intuitive than logical, more sensitive than practical. It mumbles in stumbling through the objective world” (qtd. in *Penelope’s Web* 27-29). However, as H.D. was neither a “mumbling” nor “stumbling” intellectual, delving into her open relationship with the “objective world” more clearly explains her motives. H.D. often synthesized her scientific knowledge with her understanding of spirituality into what she called “spiritual realism,” a palimpsestic model where the temporary and eternal were layered upon each other (*The Walls Do Not Fall* 40). The temporary is grounded in exterior events, which Morris calls “the least layer of the palimpsest,” while the eternal constitutes “large, profound, enduring truths” of life, which H.D. found in both her Moravian Christian background and her syncretic adaptations of mythology (“Review” 199).

Thus, a more truthful exploration of H.D.'s prose requires spiritual nuance to capture the essence of her multi-layered poetics.²

As the initiating work in the structure of H.D.'s prose projects, *Palimpsest* offers two other avenues of thought that both offer this nuance and enhance our understanding of her use of psychoanalytic theory. Like H.D., Hipparchia, Raymonde, and Helen experience literary creativity as a sacrosanct ritual through which they connect with eternal truths. This transcendence vividly manifests as a fertile oceanic landscape, one of H.D.'s quintessential motifs, which I will refer to as "Sea Garden" (borrowing from the title of H.D.'s first poetry collection published in 1916). In her memoir *A Tribute to Freud*, H.D. notes that she always considered her "psychic experiences" as "sub-aqueous," a direct adaptation of Freud's belief that man's subconscious was an "unexplored depth [that] ran like a great ... ocean underground" (xxix-xxx). In *Palimpsest*, Sea Garden acts almost like a day-dream (reminiscent of Freud's phantasies in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"), overlapping and beautifying dull surroundings with fish, flowers, and the blue hues. This palimpsestic layering of setting, however, functions as more than a mental escape or wandering imagination. This is an actual contact with the eternal, enhancing the characters' normal ocular vision as an extension of the mind and augmenting their concrete realities to transform each into a priestess seeing visions and their poems into "auguries" and "Delphic oracles" (*Palimpsest* 162, 150). Elizabeth Anderson argues that Sea Garden's setting "suggests ritualizing activity and a process of invoking the sacred" (106-107). Morris argues that it encourages H.D.'s audience to not only read about "sea gods" but to actually "see gods," to commune with the spiritual forces around them (*How to Live* 19).³ Her oceanic landscape reintegrates spirituality lost in a secularly bleak culture, stratifying a

psychological, spiritual, and poetic complexity back into life that promotes rejuvenating humankind through spiritual realism.

Sea Garden's facilitation of spiritual experiences portrayed through marine imagery affords H.D.'s novel a heightened relevance and resonance in the wake of critical preoccupations with postsecular theory as well as with oceanic and archipelagic theory. The postsecular often refers to analyzing areas in Western modernity's secular history which have still "gestured toward the spiritual, to its religious heritages and the numinous nature of so much of human experience" (Bradley et al. 3). One could argue that modern culture is marked by the clear distinction between the secular and religious, but unlike other modernists, Anderson argues, H.D. did not replace religion with art but instead saw art as "a means to, and expression of, spiritual understanding" where "vision becomes a catalyst of writing, while writing gives expression to vision" (2-3). In this process, where spirituality (eternal) gives rise to and takes form in writing (temporary), H.D. draws energy largely from marine imagery, stemming from a personal adoption of the ocean as her preferred physical manifestation of the layering in her palimpsestic spiritual realism. Sea Garden's physical characteristics reflect an understanding of the powerful analogy presented by the relationship between water and land, bringing her novel into dialogue with critical work surrounding oceanic and archipelagic thought. By seeing "culture's song arising from nature, from the sounds of the sea in particular," where a pebble thrown into the ocean "sounds out God's act as creation as well as the poet's," we can extract the essence of H.D.'s intended metaphors for Sea Garden's spirit-infused modernism (Naylor 141).⁴ Oceanic and archipelagic scholarship provides key epistemological tools for grasping H.D.'s "sub-aqueous" experiences.

In this essay, I will argue that intertwining postsecular and oceanic/archipelagic lenses has an important and unsuspected impact on how we read *Palimpsest*. To view her creative process as a spiritual palimpsest manifesting in marine imagery, I borrow from and adapt theoretical frameworks from postsecular and oceanic and archipelagic thinkers to reanalyze H.D.'s links between art and modernism as an alternative and complement to the traditionally adopted Freudian influence. While critics have seen the novel as merely H.D.'s modernist reconciliation with the past (and autobiographically her past), I argue that reading through layered oceanic/archipelagic and postsecular lenses, we can see that she ultimately attempts to lay the foundation for a forward movement into her calling as a poet (a writer of poetry *and* her adopted genre of poetic prose novels) and oracle, a hopeful and, at times, grim examination of her destiny as a writer in a world relinquished to modernity's malaise.⁵ By taking this view, we can also gain specific insight into major critical questions regarding the scientific theory approached in the novel, like the blurring of time and space by splitting the novel into three narratives or even the inconsistency of theoretical terms, which no longer appears textually puzzling but rather methodical in its oceanic spirituality. While H.D.'s ideas about spiritual realism appear in her other works (the clearest iterations of them coming from a post-World War II H.D., whose poetics have had time to crystalize in works like *Trilogy*), *Palimpsest* uniquely inaugurates her launch into the new medium for modern artistic theorizing as the initiating work in her novel cycles. Through it, H.D. embodies her theories about creative writers' intuitive, spiritual insight via the conscious, subconscious, and over-conscious minds in Hipparchia, Raymonde, and Helen, characters who reach far into the past and resonate in each other's futures. Thus, *Palimpsest* stands as both reaction and anticipation, with retrospective and prospective movements, toward a grander spiritual purpose, where the modern poetess acting as

a prophetess in the face of disenchanted culture can establish spiritual realism—with its accompanying beauty and sublimity—as a viable option for understanding.

Enhancing Modern Secularism with Sea Garden

To begin analyzing H.D.'s development of her poetics, understanding her separation from the modernist secularism of Freud that she adored yet contested provides some necessary pieces with which to critically assemble the development of her creative process. Freud's influence on H.D. provides a vivid backdrop against her postsecular inclinations, as he offers an intensely secular representation of her modern milieu.⁶ His personal investigation and rejection of religion appears many times throughout his work, particularly in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where he argues that religion is an illusory reaction to underdeveloped relationships. In the latter, however, while discussing the reaction of a friend (Romain Rolland) to *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud writes the following: "He [Rolland] was sorry I had not properly appreciated the true source of religious sentiments. This, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling ... which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded — as it were, 'oceanic'" (10-11). Freud explains that this "is a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole," and he admits, "I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in myself" (11-12). Though Freud does not deny other people's ability to feel it, he diagnoses it as a potentially pathological state, a distinct division of religious possibility and scientific knowledge representative of a modern secular stance that H.D. opposed as one ardently acquainted with the "'oceanic' feeling."

In Part Two of *Palimpsest*, H.D. describes this feeling through Raymonde's conjectures about the world. Raymonde states, "Life was one huge deep sea and flat on its surface, merging,

mingling was the business of existence. ... That meant diving deep, deep, deep” (160). Like Rolland’s oceanic feeling, to Raymonde, this “deep sea” symbol represents that which lies beyond the self, a feeling of transcendent connectedness to “faces, people, London. People, faces, Greece. Greece, people, faces. Egypt ... on, on, on, on, on” (157). In his book *Archipelagic Modernism* (2014), John Brannigan observes that many modernist novels featuring ocean motifs depict catastrophes, such as decimating tidal waves, city-swallowing lagoons, and looming sea-levels that completely alter known continents and geographies, marking a cultural longing among artists to sink or sweep away a decaying culture. He argues that these “fictions of submergence” actually “point to a recalibration,” a poignant symbol for modernist thought in archipelagic spaces where water plays an important role in its cultural development and history (17).⁷ As a transatlantic modernist, H.D.’s own relationship with the ocean—having been fundamentally inspired by her early childhood visits to the New England coast, experiencing the spiritual visions that led to her compose *Notes* while visiting Sicily, and leaning her imagination largely on the Greek archipelago’s mythology regarding the sea—likewise influences her own “fictions of submergence,” from works like *Sea Garden* to *Trilogy* (Anderson 2). However, unlike the generally destructive environmental reclamation in Brannigan’s archipelagic modernism, H.D.’s ocean is a boundless, fruitful, spiritual seascape, offering a much more hopeful recalibration, one full of spiritual transcendence and eternal connectivity. She sees the possibility of enhancing and transforming modern culture rather than erasing it. In a more secular perspective of the world, like Freud’s, this project is not possible and perhaps even psychopathologic, which draws a very strong distinction between his secular and H.D.’s more postsecular paradigms for understanding the world.

Charles Taylor's postsecular model of the "porous" and "buffered self" from his book *A Secular Age* helps us to characterize the difference between Freud and H.D.'s approaches. Raymonde's feelings of her mind being an "eternal witness of the spirit" describe an understanding of a self open to external influences, such as transcendent forces, spiritual entities, or, in Raymonde's case, "our final attainment" (143, 163). According to Taylor, this porous, or "unbounded" in Rolland's and Taylor's terms, self is vulnerable to external powers, necessitating safeguards like prayer or other rituals to protect against potentially malevolent forces (*A Secular Age* 38). Conversely, a modernized, secularized society (which has seemingly disabused itself of unsophisticated superstition or religious dogma in favor of material laws, like scientific theories) understands the self as buffered, or "bounded," impervious to direct influence of things beyond (Taylor, *A Secular* 38). This perspective focuses on inwardness, thriving on "the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths" and possibly disregarding outward sources of meaning (Taylor, *Sources* x). Thus, the buffered self can become "blind or insensitive to whatever lies beyond this ordered human world," like Freud's incapacity to comprehend the oceanic feeling (Taylor, *A Secular* 302).

In Part One of *Palimpsest*, we encounter two characters who somewhat characterize Taylor's paradigm of buffered and porous selves. These characters are Marius, a Roman soldier representing a secularized society, and Hipparchia, a Greek *hetaera* and believer in her people's ancient religious traditions. The novel's first few pages establish Marius' opinion that, "like all cultivated Romans," the Greeks' "pathos" and "flame" were outdated, and Hipparchia's "religion was in its final decadence" (5, 3). For Marius, "Rome had no prophets and no prophesying," and what particularly marks his distinction between Rome and Greece is how his civilization constantly fights against "trade and the sea" (37, 20). In this delineation, Rome's land-based

focus directly opposes the Greek marine lifestyle, but this is more than a mere struggle for empire. He concludes, “We fight, fighting Greeks, some supernatural Spirit,” and despite Rome’s disciplined attempts at destroying this spirit, Hipparchia likewise insists throughout the rest of the narrative that “Greece is a spirit. Greece is not lost” (20, 94). As a Greek citizen, she embodies this spirit, distinctly marked with oceanic descriptions, first through her identity as a member of a sea-trading people and later in her profession. Marius observes that in the midst of a visionary trance, Hipparchia “became a creature of swift waters” with her influence acting as “a great incurving tide,” and because of her influences, he realizes he is “stranded, beached on a fragile, difficult and cruel islet” (24, 22).

Marius is bounded in his island exile, unable or unwilling to feel beyond the edges of his isolation. In her analysis of the ancient Greek archipelago, Christy Constantakopoulou observes that “hand in hand with the history of the sea and its islands is the history of the concept of insularity,” on the one hand, the island representing an isolated “‘closed’ world” (1-2). No doubt this closed world of insularity resembles Marius’ Roman secular perspective to the degree that he considers himself to be stranded on an island. As the narrator further describes it, Marius yearns for “absolute, firm rock,” destroying in himself the “ambition or desire for further voyagings,” unwilling to experience the oceanic feeling of connection within spiritual belief (27). In contrast to the version of the island that might be analogized to the buffered self, Constantakopoulou advances another version of insularity in which islands can represent “an expression of connectivity,” their connection arising from the archipelagic assemblage of islands and seaways in the Aegean Sea (2). Unlike Marius, Hipparchia finds an unbounded, connective freedom in the ocean as she spiritually engages with her poetic power. Her Sea Garden visions palimpsestically layer upon her physical conditions, which at once transcend and transform her world around her,

while also providing a muse for her thoughts and poems, transfiguring Hipparchia psychologically:

Life, a black torrent, had drawn its dark tide away from her, away from her, away from Hipparchia who stood now a giant Thetis among islands. ... With half-closed eyes, blinded with summer, half drugged with the summer fragrance, she seemed (giant) to tower, to outgrow earth and human possibilities, to be (in all the world) the one fated to recall the islands, to string them, thread them, irregular jagged rough-jewel on a massive necklet, no frail woman-ornament, nor one to be bartered for fresh continents, but to be laid simply at an altar, she officiating to re-sanctify it. (41)

Through Sea Garden's spiritual influence, Hipparchia changes from ordinary woman into demi-goddess, opening capacities beyond the limiting constraints of her life as a foreign slave in Rome, beyond its secular, buffered boundaries. Unlike Marius' isolating exile, the ocean gives her archipelagic connectivity.

The divide between Rome's secularism and Greece's belief in Marius and Hipparchia starts the novel with H.D.'s primary motive for this literary project: to reintroduce spiritual connection into modern society. Taylor argues modern culture tends to "stifle the spirit," and he desires a "retrieval ... to uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again to the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit" (*Sources* 520). Similar to Taylor's postsecular project, H.D.'s advocacy for spiritual realism attempts to reinvigorate "the murky, dead, old, thousand-times explored old world, the dead world" using the "world of the great creative artists [that] is never dead" (*Notes* 24). For her, Sea Garden provides the setting for that world of spiritually-enhanced connectivity. For Brannigan,

like Constantakopolou, the archipelagic stringing together of islands with their surrounding waters offers modernists a figurative and metaphorical model through which to explore connection and communication (10-11). For H.D., this takes the form of woman connecting with her true spiritual self, the demi-goddess priestess. Finding this “self-definition” in the sea, Kenneth Fields argues, helped H.D.’s “world [that] was broken ... cohere” (xlii). The black tide of reality retreats, leaving the beauty of Sea Garden’s archipelagic island chains instead, and this spiritual reality breathes life and possibility into her otherwise bleak humanity with “tropic, more exotic waters” (*Palimpsest* 27).

Oceanic Literary Reality

In the *Palimpsest*, H.D.’s postsecular project works as Marius opens himself to the possibility of belief due to Hipparchia’s influence. Her poetic line “Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?” repeats over and over in his mind, and he views Hipparchia as a “priestess” and “demi-goddess” and sees the “honey-colored hyacinth” and Neriads of Sea Garden (5, 24, 3-4). He is “flooded with a realisation of his particular longing,” sensing that “Greeks inordinately must rule forever, not Rome, but prophetically the whole world,” and he spends the rest of Part One attempting to reconcile these oceanic feelings (6, 11-12).

However, though Hipparchia’s poetic influence on Marius was fruitful, H.D.’s own efforts to engage with secularists met with less success. Claire Buck explains that Freud’s “Delusion and Dream in Jensen’s *Gradiva*” (1907) probably encouraged H.D.’s spiritual realism project since it scientifically systematizes the creative writer’s poetic intuition in ways that alienate women (i.e. penis envy) (82-83). Moravian theology asserts that the Holy Spirit is female, a Mother opposite to the Father God, whose partnership created Christ, and as a poetess,

a female creator, H.D. could offer her own Hermetic wisdom as a supplement to Freud's psychoanalytic theories (Anderson 45).⁸ Her essay *Notes on Thought and Vision* engages Freud's scientific discussion, and Chisolm argues that H.D. wrote it "for an actual or imaginary audience of psychologists, posing her self and her work as specimen material for new science" (21). In one instance, H.D. describes presenting her ideas to an unnamed scholar for his scrutiny:

He says my term over-mind is not good, because in his case at least, the mental state I describe lies below the sub-conscious mind. That is, I visualise my three states of consciousness in a row, 1. Over-conscious mind. 2. Conscious mind. 3. Sub-conscious mind. He on the other hand visualises his three states, 1. Conscious mind. 2. Sub-conscious mind. 3. Universal mind. He means by universal mind exactly what I mean by over-mind but certain my term over-mind is not adequate.

(*Notes* 46)

Adopting the language and modes of psychoanalytic science, H.D. defines and defends her theories yet enhances them with her spiritual insight. For example, she describes the over-mind as "jelly-fish over [her] head" that connects her to the spiritual energy focused inside her forehead like a "pearl" to be used as a "crystal ball is used, for concentrating and directing pictures from the world of vision" (*Notes* 50-51). L. S. Dembo suggests that *Notes* seeks to "define and convey a mystical psychic state," religious mysticism being key to understanding the functions of a multi-layered consciousness (222). Despite her attempts to appeal to a scientific audience, *Notes* was rejected by H.D.'s close friend Havelock Ellis, a distinguished sexologist and Freud enthusiast whom she kept in mind as she wrote it. This came as a grave disappointment, which Friedman argues caused H.D. to abandon *Notes* (indicating why it remained unpublished until 1982) and never again attempt any similar essay (*Penelope's Web*

12). Instead, H.D. turned to a more unbounded genre—the poetic prose novel—encoding her theories in Sea Garden’s motif in literary spaces beyond rigid secular rubrics.⁹

In this vein, John A. McClure’s observations about postsecular fiction are helpful in looking at *Palimpsest*, which is both a novel and H.D.’s first attempt at a theory-laden literary treatise. He notes that themes of surmounting restrictive societal norms have arisen in works by the Romantics, the transcendentalists, and the modernists, and that these groups often construe the themes to their own ends (McClure 3). However, what remains common among them is that the works’ metaphysics often involve religious or spiritual disruptions of secular constructions of reality (McClure 3). As a modernist novel, *Palimpsest* likewise disrupts secular constructions of time, space, and the individual with its portrayal of spirituality. For example, the novel is broken into three parts, their three narratives somewhat overlapping in theme and style though distinct in time and place. Yet many portions were written one upon the (not quite erased past of) the other with the last peeping through when viewed with the over-mind’s lens. Raymonde sees “faces, people, London” but also Greece and Egypt, herself existing in a “War and Postwar London” (circa 1916-1926 CE) though somehow linked to Hipparchia, a Greek who lives in “War Rome” (circa 75 BCE), and Helen, who lives in “Excavator’s Egypt” (circa 1925 CE). Helen’s own narrative starts with an overview of her brain, which provides an “indefinably Hellenic (English? American?)” “kind of thinking,” reminiscent of both Hipparchia’s nationality and Raymonde’s expat background (173). Duncan claims that the novel “is a study in reincarnations,” where “the image of an identity [of] one person has been erased to make room for another” (81). As though Hipparchia’s spiritual descendent, Raymonde and her narrative is riddled with the external influence of Hipparchia’s poetic legacy, from similar oceanic lines of poetry to contemplations of Greek mythological gods and demigoddesses. Meanwhile, Helen and Raymonde, somehow

spiritual copies of each other, are alive at the same time, connected through the over-mind though living in different locations. Duncan argues that the novel weaves a maze through reality, where the reader can get “the sense of other meanings and realms,” where “it is not the past or present time but a blur” as the characters “coexist” in “a womb of time where there is not before and after” (86-87).

Some of the psychoanalytic scholarship mentioned in this essay’s introduction suggests that the triple protagonists may only seem united via H.D.’s autobiographical interests, such as records of trauma and loss or instances of feminine sexuality. However, if viewed as a literary presentation of H.D.’s theories regarding spiritual poetic intuitions aiding secular society’s shortcomings, the assemblage of these characters reveals a transcendent overview of the eternal principles uniting these three. Hipparchia, Raymonde, and Helen’s poetic connections to Sea Garden offer possible ways of navigating the depths of Freud’s oceanic feeling, their spiritual intuition acting as guides. The spread of these characters across a disrupted overview of time and space explains vital elements of Sea Garden’s transcendence. In her analysis of area studies, Miriam Cooke, using the Mediterranean Sea as an example, points out that the relationship between land and sea represents a place of connectivity, a deterritorialized crossroads, where mingling of land-dwellers occurs (297). Since this oceanic space is “an abstract network but also a very real body of water, the lands that surround it, and the history that holds them together,” the land/sea-scape composites become more than the sum of their parts (Cooke 299). This synergetic binary shows how Sea Garden, a composite of both land and ocean, becomes an exceptional symbol for transcendence over space and time as well, since, according to Cooke, its relationship to history, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic civilizations, and geopolitical circumstances connects its materiality to “the near and the far in time and space” (294). This

analytical frame balances and equalizes individual components of thought, history, and circumstance, allowing for a transcendent look at all of them in relation to each other at the same moment. Thus, the diachronic ocean/landscape of Sea Garden creates an advantaged platform from which to extrapolate overarching unities in a seemingly disparate array of peoples, cultures, and timelines.

This helps us to understand Hipparchia, Raymonde, and Helen's similar yet separate navigations through Sea Garden, a literary setting for the sub-aqueous psychic explorations of the over-mind. Raymonde's own connection to Sea Garden feels like "her mind was a glass that was set between this world, this present and the far past that was eternal" and that "the gem, the eternal truth, the eternal law, the song, the saga was beyond the shallow boundary of nationality" (163, 158-159). Through the unbounded oceanic feelings, Raymonde's transcendence of self and of country, culture, history, and time has very little meaning without the representations of Hipparchia and Helen bookending her experience. Hipparchia's existence in an ancient century and Helen's contemporary existence in a different country and culture presents the reality that people, particularly artists, can act as nodes in a timeless, unbounded, oceanic nexus. As Raymonde observes, "The room, eternally the same, and thousands of years and interspersing civilizations but the armchair the same and the notebook and the pencil, implements of her trade" (169). Three writers adopting spiritual realism can present the eternal truths, their poetic intuition standing outside the distinct divides of mortality like time and space.

Transcending Humanity to Dive Deep

Besides chronological time and geographic space, other secular scientific conventions of reality also fall by the wayside, such as systematized procedures for poetic process (like Freud

attempted) or consistent terminology for her theories (which Freud's disciples regulated). Some scholars like Kloefer have criticized the novel for this, and this could be because "HD's [sic] intellect is more intuitive than logical, more sensitive than practical," as McAlmon suggested, or because she seeks portrays a world "where the rhythms of active rationality recede." However, this could also indicate something more abstract. Gavin D'Costa suggests that postsecular literature's space for religious impulses in the creative imagination "generates and mimics traces of the divine" because of its "revelatory possibilities" (x). For H.D., this revelatory possibility manifests in Sea Garden's transformative world of vision, creating a reality that approaches the divine, like Hipparchia's poetic trance transforming her into a demi-goddess. However, unlike Freud's structured approach to the creative process, H.D.'s spiritual realist approach in *Palimpsest* manifests as an actual transcendence of humanity, extending beyond the boundaries of the immanent and material and exploring oceanic transcendence as a psychic experience beyond human confines. The expansive, eternal ocean of the "jelly-fish" over-mind helps the poet exceed her humanity, implying a transcendence beyond the limitations of culture, language, and even human form.

Helen Fairwood best illustrates this through her marine animal transformation. Through her own poetic mastery of Sea Garden's visionary power, Helen becomes a sea creature: "Herself with her gold and black, speckled like a fish, was a fish that some sun had specked with gold that had sunk, down, down to some unexplored region of the consciousness, that had sunk, loosing in the sinking beneath wave and wave of comforting obscurity, shape, identity" (221). By psychically transforming into a fish, Helen familiarizes herself with its body, surroundings, and self, gaining "more-than-human" knowledge through its experience, but this was an experience beyond the "English words" that could "call her back to her brain" (221). Elizabeth

DeLoughrey's and Stacy Alaimo's discussions of human and non-human interfaces in oceanic spaces provide some insight into what Helen's transformative vision might mean. Alaimo argues that human interactions with oceanic zones reveal "no firm divide between mind and matter, organism and environment, self and world," instigating a possible "trans-corporeality," where the human body and its connection to a marine environment opens spaces for understanding beyond our limited experiences (282-83). Just as Helen needs recalling to her brain, her vision has allowed her a trans-corporeal wandering into a fish's identity; she experiences something beyond the bodily distinction between herself and the self of a fish despite bodily limitation. In a similar and illuminating mode, DeLoughrey argues that because the coastal strand or shoreline acts as "a space in which the borders between human and nonhuman are blurred," it offers a "new hermeneutics" for interpreting knowledge (354). As an alternative to the English language her human form uses, Helen's fish form instead adopts the non-human language of marine life:

The curious sibilance that seemed the speech of under-sea creatures to each other. So might dragons, octopuses, wave-shaped deep sea serpents, serpent-shaped sea-fish converse with one another. ... This speech which in the intellect had no answering tick and throb of telegraphic response, that eluded intellect ... that was yet familiar, that crossed in grass-like tenuous lines the great spaces of unexplored subconsciousness. (221)

Helen is not completely literate in this new language of the subconscious ocean and in fact insists upon her illiteracy at first (220). This illiteracy hints at the enigma of a poet-prophetess attempting to translate into words the marrow of her visions. Morris argues that the images of Sea Garden actually deploy "a series of hieroglyphics, which are both visual and aural" that the poet does not need to control but simply must "read out for her listeners" (*How to Live* 46).

As a poet-oracle, writing's limitations are her own limitations. Faced with the Egyptian hieroglyphs in the surrounding tombs, Helen stares at the symbols and sees how they are both "like writing clear-marked with a slim branch on wet sand" and "a thing transient, to be washed out by next morning's tide" (206). In this setting, words "had actually lost [their] outline," "blurred over for her, though some intimation, some insistence on demarcations persisted" (202). In this moment, she understands that in the face of eternity, just as her own body dissolves with time, writing can be blurred, faded, and ultimately overwritten—the truest characteristic of a palimpsest. Eternity, the ocean outside of time and space, washes away writing with its cyclical tide, just like the writing on the temples in Egypt have faded. From this "insect and dehumanised form" that opposed her human consciousness, with its "human fitness" and "human values," she discovers that "she, after all, was nothing" (209, 211). With her own nothingness, her own illiteracy of the eternal, she realizes the world around her is a transient phase in the human timeline, just as her body is. She ends her narrative seeing a "high, brittle; modernity. Glass and ice civilisation" (238). In the face of her immanent reality's obvious mortality, she must accept the immortal part of herself – her spirit that is beyond human – if she is to truly transcend her own mortal limitations.

For H.D., this is the revelatory possibility of the poet: to seek the divine beyond the writing itself. To discover this eternal part of herself, Helen searches for what could withstand the erosion of eternity. This manifests as a complete communion between the jellyfish consciousness and the rest of her mind, not a "juggler" balanced between "two shining and slippery worlds" (176). This mode of interfacing depends on a type of omen-reading, fantastic or supernatural transformations of space and time, like DeLoughrey's "new hermeneutics" for understanding and adapting to a dynamic, mutating human and "more-than-human" world. To do

this, Helen looks for “some mystic suggestion ... that made one, illiterate, drop, drop down from the edge of the flat earth into some realm, deep, hidden from the curious, prodding brain” (230). Rather than a rising transcendence, this is a descent into that which is unfathomable by her conscious mind, dropping off the face of a limited understanding, bounded by an immanent reality, diving into the deepest regions of the psyche. To do this, she once again empathically unites with the wisdom of the ocean and goes “fishing”:

Sitting on the temple wall ... she could make her formal constatation [sic]. A fish sunk deep into layer upon layer of sea, layer on layer rather of fresh lake water, with memory of glint and speck and fleck and streak of daylight gold. Deep in some dark layer and layer of inwash and overwash and interplay of current, leaving one released, free, inundated thus and indis severable. (230)

A self that is open to the eternal can be inundated until the mortal is worn down, releasing the “indis severable” portions of the mind and spirit, so she no longer needs to access the over-mind because those portions are no longer separated. It is as if all the layers of the palimpsest and the psyche have collapsed into one whole. Helen has moved beyond more-than-human, the new hermeneutics of her indis severable self that now guiding her by an “unfathomable intuition,” allowing her to move past the fleeting hieroglyphs (235-236).

This changes Helen’s understanding of her surroundings, allowing her to end her narrative by discovering the brittleness of the world around her in contrast to the “fourth-dimensional” self she can now adopt (236). Alaimo suggests these types of perceptions would develop a posthuman existence that could guide us toward a more ethical and aware relationship with our environment (282). However, H.D. would take this one step further, viewing interfacing with the sea as a freedom “from the insistent tyranny of brain,” where the poet may fathom the

“unexplored region of the consciousness” to find the truth that lies beyond the reach of normal people (211, 221). According to Jane Augustine, for H.D., “the unconscious ... is also the higher consciousness coterminous with the Holy Spirit,” the Moravian female co-creator, and navigating its depths allows the poet to see more than what a human can see and influencing her creative energies to produce in ways that no other humans can create (22). This is beyond systematized processes or formal organizations of terminology because it is the divine process of creation, one beyond culture, language, and body, beyond the “ice and glass, brittle” against “the inwash of terrific ocean breakers” (238).

Transformations of Poetic Intuitions

Using postsecular and oceanic/archipelagic approaches in analyzing *Palimpsest* reveals many of the underlying modes and motives of H.D.’s novel cycles as literary engagements with psychoanalysis, works that allow her to present herself, and poets like herself, as creators capable of poetic intuitions that can fathom the depths of the multi-layered psyche. McClure argues that postsecular narratives “reconcile important secular and religious intuitions,” the joining of which create spiritual gifts that transform and reawaken people to their “impulses of reverence, wonder, self-forgetfulness, and care” (6). As a modernist, H.D. presents spiritual realism’s role in her artistic craft not as an alternative to religion but as an alternative to modernity’s limitation, suggesting that through accessing the over-mind, Sea Garden’s beautifying power of spiritual impulses can reveal eternal truths that transcend the fleeting woes of mankind, however deeply ingrained or well-articulated.

Despite the failure of offering herself as a specimen of poetic intuition to secular disciplines, H.D.’s advance into the literary genre of poetic prose novels allowed her characters

to continue offering themselves as models for spiritual realism's application. These fictional situations offer example applications for spiritual realism, suggesting their use and misuse in the lives of people still searching for their own meaning, healing, and inspiration via Sea Garden's transformative power. For H.D., her duty as poet required her to master her craft, knowing how to use the lens of the jelly-fish consciousness to reveal the secret of transforming the human into the more-than-human while also navigating the human experience as an individual, since the over-mind is only a part of the multi-layered composite of consciousness.

However, cautious regarding what she seems to have regarded as the imbalances of a diseased mind, H.D. also provided a warning for those poets sensitive enough to engage with Sea Garden should they fail to balance their use of the over-mind in navigating and enhancing the conscious and subconscious minds. She ends two narratives of the three with a further encouragement to master this process, suggesting that she herself struggled with the use of her poetic insight. Hipparchia's undisciplined use of her over-mind as an escapist retreat from her earthly cares causes her to wander "in her wraith-like and disembodied ecstasy [sic] (some hours since?) toward a silver flood that had threatened to shut down on her, to prison her, tomb-like in some Egyptian coffin" (39). It eventually drives her mad by loosening her hold on reality, her jelly-fish consciousness trapping her in a bubble of the over-mind. Though she manages to marginally function, ultimately the detachment from the immanent world cripples her as a human being, and she ends her story in a confused daze. With Raymonde, H.D. seems to suggest that harmonious implementation of the jelly-fish consciousness to achieve effective spiritual realism takes continued practice and effort. Raymonde's story ends with a budding relationship between herself and the murex shell where she learns to not turn away from memory and find power and healing through writing poetry. She tells herself to "find other things, not stare and stare any

longer into the crystal ball of her past, all the memories shut up in one small spherical surface, her own head, to be watched going round and round and round” (172). In fact, she still worries that the jelly-fish could turn into an octopus and strangle everyone, suggesting it could destroy her if she is unable to “maintain” it (159). This suggests that she cannot simply use this heightened awareness to remember her past, but she must discipline her faculties to resolve the past as well to continue to move forward toward powerful transcendence.

Arthur Bradley, Jo Carruthers, and Andrew Tate argue that “literature constitutes a privileged space in which the return of the religious can take place” (3). My reading of *Palimpsest* suggests that perhaps literature is not only privileged because it is free from the same criticisms of scientific scrutiny but also because literature also provides a paradoxically temporal manifestation of the eternity that writers engage with when using their poetic insight into the over-mind’s transformative power. For H.D. in *Palimpsest*, we see that writers’ words can eventually be erased by time, eroded to make room for the next bodies of work available to those who would see into the eternities. This explains H.D.’s epigraphic poem at the beginning of *Palimpsest*, an ode to stars that outlast “disenchanted, cold, imperious” lights and keep “lone and frigid trist to freight ships baffled in wind and blast” (v). Unlike the modern ideas shared by some of her contemporaries, for H.D., writing does not exist for the craft’s sake nor does art replace the need for religion in a secular world, especially since a palimpsest’s symbolism reveals that writing can be literally worn away, “blighted” to “reel and fall” (v). Rather, the power of her craft belongs in the eternal, oceanic elements that transcend the brittle, disenchanted immanent. In the novel, true artists, those open to Sea Garden’s influence and allow it to transform them into more-than-human beings, offer a grander truth beyond their craft to those like Marius (and Freud) who cannot feel the oceanic in their secular state. This objective

for H.D.'s spiritual realism in *Palimpsest* helps us rethink what role spiritual understanding actually plays in a postsecular literary genre. The novel's Sea Garden motif likewise provides an oceanic and archipelagic reimagining for the characteristics of water and land and its implications for thinking in a multi-layered consciousness that is open to outside influence, porous not only to transcendent forces but also to the erasure of all bifurcating lines. Poet-oracle H.D. assures, "Life was one huge deep sea, merging, mingling was the business of existence. Verses. That meant diving, deep, deep, deep" (160).

¹ See Anderson 111 and DiPace Fritz 3.

² In her review of *Herself Defined*, Morris also criticizes Barbara Guest's attempt to downplay the spiritual, condemning Guest's reductions of H.D.'s spirituality into "grotesque and silly gropings after the insubstantial" ("Review" 198).

³ As a poetic visionary, H.D. describes this process of seeing the spiritual as an integral function of the multi-layered consciousness: for those sensitive enough to perceive and work with these states (artists), the over-mind or jelly-fish consciousness works in conjunction with the conscious and subconscious minds as "a lens of an opera glass," and "when these lenses are properly adjusted and focused, they bring the world of vision into consciousness" (*Notes* 23). Thus, artists have access to transcendent spiritual and extrasensory experiences through the over-mind, reminiscent of Emerson's "oversoul" or "transparent eyeball," gaining access to Sea Garden. Visited through the different layers of consciousness and implemented like an enhancement to her ocular vision of the world around her, Sea Garden, or See Garden, embodies a spiritual reality, the perfect motif for her spiritual realism.

⁴ Naylor is specifically referring to Edward Kamau Braithwaite and Walt Whitman as poets who use the ocean metaphor to "embody their experiences of the union of cosmology and autobiography" (140).

⁵ See Anderson 2 and Kloepfer 186-188.

⁶ See H.D.'s *A Tribute to Freud*.

⁷ For example, Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920) describes shores "washed in the cobalt of oblivions" with the "phantasmal sea-surge" that bursts and destroys, drowning artists and hedonists.

⁸ This explains H.D.'s interest in ideas that would later be called gynopoetics.

⁹ Freud himself regarded the creative writer as a person who could present "his plays to us or tell us what we are inclined to take to be his personal daydreams" without fear of shame or self-reproach, unlike regular adults who needed to hide such "phantasies," and creative writers' presentations earned their readers' "great pleasure" rather than social rejection ("Creative Writers" 153).

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