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# H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)

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"H.D." (Hilda Doolittle)

by

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H. D.

## INTRODUCTION

It is at least an anomaly that a poet whom many fine critics have been tempted to call the most perfect or nearly perfect of all American poets has received comparatively little acclaim from the multitudes who read and appreciate poetry. But such is the status of H. D., a woman who has been call also an anachronism, and who is at least an enigma.

Because she has been so highly esteemed by the world's most capable critics she surely deserves a somewhat more detailed and inclusive treatment than has in the past been given to her. This thesis aims at presenting and evaluating all the possible phases of her work, dealing specifically with her life, philosophy, poetic method, her Imagism, Classicism, translations, and her prose efforts.

## EPITAPH

So I may say,
"I died of living,
having lived one hour";

so they may say,
"she died soliciting
illicit fervour";

so you may say,
"Greek flower; Greek ecstasy
reclaims for ever

one who died
following
intricate songs' lost measure."

# I.

# LIFE OF H. D.

# LIFE OF H. D.

Hilda Doolittle, known throughout the poetic world merely as H. D., was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, September 10, 1886. When her father, Professor Charles L. Doolittle, became Director of the Flower Astronomical Observatory at the University of Pennsylvania, the family moved to a suburb of Philadelphia where Hilda attended the public school. Later she attended a private school in West Philadelphia where she remained until 1902 when she left to be prepared for college at Friend's Central School. In the autumn of 1904 she entered Bryn Mawr College, but was there little more than a year when a complete breakdown of health forced her to withdraw.

At Bryn Mawr she had two claims to distinction: she read Greek and Latin as easily as she did French; and, an ironic fact, she flunked English. Of the latter point she says:

> "I do recall...how somewhat shocked I was at Bryn Mawr to be flunked quite frankly in English. I don't know why or how this shocked me. I really did love the things even when they were rather depleted of their beauty, Beowulf and such like. I suppose that was one of the spurs toward a determination to self-expression. I do know that in some way I was rather stunned at the time." 1

1. Glenn Hughes, Imagism & the Imagists, page 60.

During the next few years of her life, which were spent in an attempt to regain her health, H. D. found time to write. Her efforts were not particularly successful though a few of her children's stories were published by a Presbyterian paper in Philadelphia. In a letter to Glenn Hughes concerning her work in poetry before 1911 she wrote:

> "....of course, I scribbled a bit, adolescent stuff. My first real serious, (and I think, in a way, successful) verses were some translations I did of Heine (before I was seriously dubbed "Imagist"). I think they were probably very lyrical in their small way, but of course I destroyed everything..... I scribbled later...a half dozen rather free verses that might have been vers libre, but I had never heard of vers libre till I was "discovered" by Ezra Pound." 2

In 1911 she sailed for Europe, intending to spend merely a summer in France, Italy and England. But London, the last stop in her itinerary, claimed her instead for years. Here she renewed her acquaintance with Ezra Pound whom she had known in Philadelphia. Pound was one of the leaders of that group of poets who later became known as Imagists. Receiving encouragement from him, H. D. adopted poetry as her career. She has said:

> "...he was beautiful about my first authentic verses, "Hermes" and "Spare Us From Loveliness", and "Acon"....and sent my poems in for me to Miss Munroe. He signed them "H. D., Imagiste". The name seems to have stuck somehow... 3

2. Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists, page 60.
3. Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists, page 61.

It was thus that H. D. was "discovered" by Pound. But he did even more or less for her when he introduced her to Richard Aldington. Their temperaments were in perfect harmony, for both were thoroughly enamoured with the same thing, Greek culture. It was to them a living, vital culture, governing their whole existence. So it was no wonder that the "two young Hellenists set out to recapture the beauties of an ancient world, and to create in modern English a poetry which in spirit and form would convey the Greek ideal." 4

As one would expect, they were soon married, the date being October of 1913. How long their married life was successful it is impossible to know, for this woman consistently confines her utterances to poetry. However, during recent years she has lived alone at a quiet retreat in Switzerland, and since 1931 she has been referred to as Hilda Doolittle, not as Mrs. Aldington. Whether or not a divorce has been secured is unknown to the world. The American in one might shout a rather blatant "why" to the apparent failure of the marriage, yet one can be sure it would go unanswered. There is a classical austerity to her nature which would militate against the baring of her strictly private life to the world. One cannot seek to know more of her than her poetry reveals. "'My songs,' she will say, 'I give you free. The singer is his song. Further seek not to know. The singer is no more than his song.'" 5

4. Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists, page 62.
5. Introduction to H. D. - "The Pamphlet Poets".

Life must be and must have been an unsatisfying experience for this woman. She has suffered the greatest possible loneliness, that of the spirit, not because she was incapable of assimilating the life of today, but because she consciously and deliberately rejected it. Yet having created a world of her own, one suffused with the beauty and majesty of thought that once was Greece, she has found no living being to share it completely with her. She has done this, however: she has made her loneliness serve the purpose of her art, and poured out in rare lyric poetry her strikingly individual conception of beauty and of love and of life; she has made her world live and breath from a printed page.

H. D. rose to prominence with Imagist movement, and was rightly acclaimed the most perfect Imagist. Since the 1920's the movement has faded into comparative obscurity, but H. D. still retains the admiration, if not the appreciation or comprehension, of those who first recognized her genius. She has never been popularly acclaimed and never will be, for her art is beyond, or at least alien to, the interests and preoccupations of the modern world.

In 1925 was published the COLLECTED POEMS OF H. D. This was composed of her previous volumes: SEA GARDEN, published in 1916; CHORUSES FROM THE IPHIGENIA IN AULIS AND THE HIPPOLYTUS OF EURIPIDES, a set of translations, in 1919; HYMEN, 1921; and HELIODORA AND OTHER POEMS, published in 1925. HIPPOLYTUS TEMPORIZES, a complete play in verse was published in 1927.

RED ROSES FOR BRONZE appeared in 1931; and finally a translation, ION OF EURIPIDES, in 1937.

Two prose volumes, PALIMPSEST and HEDYLUS, were published in 1926 and 1928 respectively. These two books complete her work in literature thus far.

# II

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF H. D.

## The Philosophy of H. D.

Only rarely does H. D. deliberately and obviously endeavor to philosophize in her poetry. These efforts have been called the least successful of her poems. But they have a tremendous power, an austere but all-encompassing faith in the ultimate victory of all that is fine and good and beautiful in man and in life.

In the poem, THE TRIBUTE, written shortly after the War, she says forcefully and powerfully:

> Squalor blights and makes hideous
> our lives - it has smothered
> the beat of our songs,
> and our hearts are spread out,
> flowers - opened but to receive
> the wheel of the cart,
> the hoof of the ox,
> to be trod of the sheep.
>
> But -
>
> Could beauty be done to death --
> though the crowd of the millions meet
> to shout and slay,
> though the host of the people pass
> and famish in bitterness,
> state by state, people by people,
> and perish - we cry.....
> Could beauty be caught and hurt
> they had done her to death with their
> sneers in ages and ages past,
> could beauty be sacrificed
> for a thrust of a sword,
> for a piece of thin money
> tossed up to fall half alloy -
> then beauty were dead
> long, long before we saw her face.
>
> Could beauty be beaten out, -
> O youth the cities have sent
> to strike at each other's strength,
> it is you who have kept her alight. 1

1. Collected Poems of H. D., page 89.

In THE GIFT she speculates on this life and the next.

> I reason:
> another life holds what this lacks,
> a sea, unmoving, quiet -
> not forcing our strength
> to rise to it, beat on beat... 2

CITIES finds her reasoning that there are in this world a few spirits of finer mold who, knowing the beauty that life once held, will lift the world "to a beauty unrivalled yet".

But such poems are not typical of H. D. In her most characteristic work there is no spiritual meaning. She does nothing more than present, and suggests no wider spiritual relationship beyond what is presented. Yet there is something that lifts her work above mere description. H. P. Collins takes from SEA GODS the lines,

> ...violets whiter than the in-rush
> of your own white surf....

and comments:

> "There is no spiritual meaning, true. But so long as there is in the reader a spiritual quality that responds to the beauty of a breaking wave or the appeal of an opening violet, the passage achieves its purpose of spiritual evocation." 3

What she is offering, then, in any particular poem is aesthetic delight.

There is further the matter of her general "message". Properly the purpose of poetry is simply to satisfy. But it is a distinctly American trait that from all our artists we

2.Collected Poems of H. D., page 20
3.Collins, Modern Poetry, page 165

demand a message, otherwise there is little or no satisfaction. On the other hand, a reader cannot make demands of H. D. ; she makes demands of the reader. From the modern point of view, her message suffers from two very closely related limitations: it is too confining, limited in itself; it is the result of a philosophy that is utterly non-American.

H. D. is a Greek, living in a recreated Hellenic past. Her artistic, cultural ideal is theirs of the one supreme quality, perfection. She is entranced with the beauty of pure thought.

> "The human mind today pleads for all; nothing is misplaced that in the end may be illuminated by the inner fire of abstract understanding; hate, love, degredation, humiliation, all, all may be examined, given due proportion and dismissed finally, in the light of the mind's vision." 4

That is essentially her phillosophy, and it is the product of pure thought.

But what more particularly is her message? Infrequently she has stated it in outspoken terms:

> But beauty is set apart,
> beauty is cast by the sea,
> a barren rock,
> beauty is set about
> with the wrecks of ships,
> upon our coasts, death keeps
> the shallows - death waits
> clutching toward us
> from the deeps.
>
> Beauty is set apart;
> the winds that slash its beach,
> swirl the coarse sand
> upward toward the rocks.
>
> Beauty is set apart . . . 5

4. Ion of Euripides by H. D., page 124
5. Collected Poems of H. D., page 184

Beauty is set apart, nor is there ever anything fragile or weak about this beauty. Her poems deal uniformly with that which is beautiful not only in coloring but in strength. Still, it is more than just earth and sky and sea; for over it, around it, in it, there is something more, the essence of beauty - the spirit. Time and time again she tries to tell us, to make us feel, to make us Know:

> Ah, could they know
> how violets throw strange fire,
> red and purple and gold,
> how they glow
> gold and purple and red . . . 6

Again she says in CHANCE MEETING:

> .... you did not sense the wings beyond the gate;
> you could not see,
> you could not touch and feel,
> actually the sea-sand
> and the sea-shell . . . 7

It will be noted that this beauty is that of flower, sea, rock, soil. It is physical beauty of which she speaks. And an interesting note in connection with this is that there is no direct reference ever to the beauty of the heavens.

Whether or not we agree with her point of view (for it is that more than it is a message) is finally of no consequence. H. D. presents the beauty she has learned from Greece. She makes no assertions, assuming that we will demand of beauty only that which the Greeks were content to demand.

6. Collected Poems of H. D., page 146
7. H. D., Red Roses for Bronze, page 104

In her personal poetry H. D. presents one more point of view, or (if we must) one more message. It is concerned with love, human love. Using a poem of Nossis she states what is none the less her own thought:

> I Nossis stand and state
> that he whom Love neglects
> has not, no flower, no grace,
> who lacks that rose, her kiss. 8

Such is the message of H. D. Its main strain is "beauty is set apart." Narrow, the result of ancient thought become strangely new, it has today fundamentally no appeal. But it must be remembered that H. D. has properly no message; she has a philosophy which unfolds itself, but she has not come before us flaunting a message.

8. Collected Poems of H. D., page 231

# III

# HER METHOD

## HER METHOD

It is less by her subject matter than by her technique that H. D. has become so distinguished and acclaimed. This is, of course, entirely in keeping with those principles of criticism through which one artist can be deemed superior to another. It is based on the truth that the matter of the poet is common to all of us and thus only in method can there be distinction. Needless to say, H. D. is one of the surest artisans in unrhymed cadence. But such acclamation is amazing and a tribute to her poetic genius, since the matter of her poems is itself so uncommon.

It has been said that H. D. was once an Imagist and must endure that name. "The technique of her early poems gave her momentum, both for her own future work and her public reputation." 1 The truth of that statement, unfortunate or not, is beside the point, the immediate concern being the technique itself. However, the technique of her Imagist poetry is with slight variations also the technique of her translations, and of her classical poetry.

H. D.'s characteristic medium is free verse. There is an occasional and very excellent use of rhyme or assonance which, however, is not part of her poetry's inherent rhythm. Her method has been typified by such terms as "short and sharp

1. R. P. Blackmur, The Lesser Satisfactions; Poetry 41: 94, Nov. 1932

line division", "staccato movement" etc. Henry R. Fairclough says of it:

> The style is staccato, strikingly plain and direct, and the sentence-structure paratactic. This is the simple manner used by children when telling stories, but it is also employed by consummate poetic artists, such as Virgil, especially in moving passages of great beauty. 2

In her earlier work (Imagistic poetry) H. D. used a short and sharp line division which maintained very effectively an artistic tension, an emotional intensity. The purpose was two-fold: (1) to crystallize the meaning - the emotional element of the content; (2) to exteriorize the emotional content or quality. An example will suffice to make this clear:

Mid-Day

...A slight wind shakes the seed-pods --
my thoughts are spent
as the black seeds.
My thoughts tear me,
I dread their fever.
I am scattered in its whirl.
I am scattered like
the hot shrivelled seeds. 3

This method aims at keeping the reader's mind fastened constantly to the physical images used in presentation. It succeeds in rendering the tiniest perception distinct and fixed exactly in the mind's eye. But the more mature work of

2. Fairclough, The Classics and Our Twentieth-Century Poets, page 34
3. Collected Poems of H. D., page 10

H. D. shows a stronger continuity and blending of phrase and phrase, image and image.

The God
III

As I stood among the bare rocks
where salt lay,
peeled and flaked
in its white drift,

I thought I would be the last
you would want,
I thought I would but scatter salt
on the ripe grapes... 4

Practically always there is a short line division, but the staccato movement is softened at times, depending on the matter and intention of the poet. Thus the poem AT ITHACA, besides illustrating her use of assonance, may serve as an example:

Over and back, the long waves crawl
and track the sand with foam;
night darkens and the sea
takes on that desperate tone
of dark that wives put on
when all their love is done.... 5

Another element in her technique or method which is an Imagistic tenet, and which lends to the intensity of her poems, is her use always of the exact word. As an accompaniment to this, there is no superabundance of words. There may be repetition of a word or phrase for some very definite purpose but there are no unnecessary words, words which are merely decorative and external to pure emotional liberation. This phase of her technique has been illustrated in the other references.

4. Collected Poems of H. D., page 66
5. Collected Poems of H. D., page 239

Free verse is a matter of cadence, and H. D.'s cadences are entirely her own. Harriet Munroe says:

> Her art has not the unstudied spontaneity of folk-lore, often so beautiful in its naivete; it is shaped by an artist, carefully wrought to an effect of seeming improvisation.... The keen rhythms of her poems respond with lyric magic to a spirit ever accepting nature's rhythms.... 6

6. H. Munroe, H. D.; Poetry 26:268-275, August 1925.

# IV

# THE IMAGIST

## H. D., IMAGIST

H. D. is known principally, and perhaps it would not be too general to say only, as an Imagist, as the perfect Imagist. How much she actually owes to Imagism, and, on the other hand, how much Imagism owes to her, is a controvertible matter. However, what evidence there is would point to the fact that the debt is almost entirely on the side of the movement. H. D. was not made by Imagism, but Imagism by her. And this brings us to a consideration of the Imagist movement itself; its tenets, aims, and accomplishments.

For the purpose of this work there is little need to enter into the history and development of the movement, except incidently as it enters into the discussion of H. D. To a degree Imagism was a derivative or culmination - depending on your point of view - of three French poetic schools, Parnassians, Individualists, and especially Symbolists. But in its English form it is acknowledged as the creation of a then comparatively unknown philosopher, T. E. Hulme.

In its final form it was based on, and proclaimed to the world, these tenets:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms as the expression of new moods - and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon free verse as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.

3. To allow absolute freedom in choice of of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.
4. To present an image(hence the name, Imagist). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry. 1

This was the credo of Imagism, a credo which evoked both critical praise and critical sneers - both somewhat loud, both somewhat silly. The Imagists themselves, championed in this country by the irrepressible Amy Lowell, maintained that they were doing no more than restating fundamentals of poetry which had been too long forgotten, or, at least, which had fallen into disuse. Nor were they. Great poetry of the past and the future will be found not in essential disharmony with the general precepts which the above credo enunciates.

The key to the whole critical battle waged around Imagism is, of course, contained in the fourth tenet, "to present an image". That was the great limitation of Imagism, its single mode of presentation.

1. Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists, page 39.

What is an "image"? It is claimed that it is not imagery, not symbolism. All is resolved into this concept: Imagism is not representation, it is presentation; it is not a symbol of reality, it is, to the poet, momentarily reality. These lines from the poem PEAR TREE might be used to illustrate the point:

> Silver dust
> lifted from the earth,
> higher than my arms reach,
> you have mounted,
> O silver,
> higher than my arms reach
> you front us with great mass... 2

This emotion of perception is presented directly, concretely - it is the emotion felt (so say the Imagists). Considered in one sense it is the emotion felt. But as a matter of fundamental common sense, what we have here is merely a manner of presentation, a poetic technique - what we have is fundamentally a representation. Presentation is effected through the image.

We have, too, in connection with the image, the question of how much the poet can accomplish with it. The credo reads, "to present an image". Can the poet present a complex thought or emotion in such a manner? Consider this poem, OREAD:

> Whirl up, sea --
> whirl your pointed pines,
> splash your great pines
> on our rocks,
> hurl your green over us,
> cover us with your pools of fir. 3

2. Collected Poems of H. D., page 58
3. Collected Poems of H. D., page 81

It is a perfect image. But it is asked to bear no more than an emotion of elemental ecstasy, a quivering thrilling to an elemental force. How much more than such a limited burden can an image carry? The answer is rather obvious; no more. And out of this arises the question, what then is the ultimate worth of such Imagism?.... It gives us some exquisite bits of emotional perception.

It must be clear that to get hold of a "complex", a variety of successive images is needed. Though some critics point with admiration to such examples of perfect Imagism as the above, it is possible also to point to other examples of Imagism no less perfect which are more than an image, which are and enfold a succession of images - in apparent violation of the letter of the Imagistic law. For example:

THE GOD

I asked of your face:
is it dark,
set beneath heavy locks
circled with stiff ivy-fruit,
clear,
cut with great hammer-stroke,
brow, nose and mouth,
mysterious and far-distant
from my sense.....

And in a moment
you have altered this;

beneath my feet, the rocks
have no strength
against the deep purple flower-embers.... 4

4. Collected Poems of H. D., page 65

But Imagism is not to be judged finally by the tenets it propounded, but rather by the poetry it produced. So let us turn now more directly to the Imagism of H. D.

While Imagism limits itself only in the mode of presentation, the Imagism of H. D. has a further limitation - one that is strictly of her own making - that of subject matter. One general statment may, I think, be made: whatever may be the particular subject matter of a poem, H. D. is usually dealing, in the broader sense, with the emotion of perception. This will become clear through the illustrations of her work which are presented in reference to other points.

But there is something more, something vital and amazing about the subject matter itself. "H. D. is never indoors. Her feet know harsh rocks but never the ordered harshness of pavements."[5] There is a wildness, a pagan or Greek spiritual and physical thrilling to elemental things in this poetry. She is a lover of the beauties of nature; of the flowers on the hills, in the valleys, among the rocks, along the seacoast - beauty that is strong, and beautiful not only in itself but in its strength. She wants no part of the stilted, artificial, the cultivated beauty of a man-tended nature. She says in SHELTERED GARDEN:

> I have had enough.
> I gasp for breath....
> I have had enough --
> border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
> herbs, sweet-cress....

5. Harriet Monroe; Poetry, August 1925, v. 26, page 268

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place. 6

And the question that keeps recurring about this and every phase of H. D.'s work is what does it mean, what part has it in her philosophic perspective? Certainly it is no mere artificial adopted attitude. Because her poetic attitude is always objective - an evidence of her artistry - she is always difficult to interpret. It is, perhaps, a part of her romanticism, her eternal seeking beyond us for something more fundamental than this age has to offer, her condemnation of our mechanistic civilization.

"I have had enough.
I gasp for breath."

H. D.'s development as an Imagist consists of two phases. The first of these is concerned with her proficiency in the use of the image. She was not, though her development was rapid and even astounding, the "perfect Imagist" at all times in her early work. The "tool edge" had to be sharpened, refined, before she became truly this.

At times her images were overdrawn; there was over precision of reference between perception and image. This early weakness is apparent in THE CONTEST;

Your stature is modelled
with straight tool-edge:
you are chiselled like rocks
that are eaten into by the sea.

6. Collected Poems of H. D., page 25

With the turn and grasp of your wrist
and the cords stretch,
there is a glint like worn brass.

The ridge of your breast is taut,
and under each the shadow is sharp,
and between the clenched muscles
of your slender hips.

From the circle of your cropped hair
there is light,
and about your male torso
and the foot-arch and the straight ankle. 7

But her touch became more sure, more true. LOSS, a later poem, aptly illustrates this phase of her development. She is again describing a warrior:

Your feet cut steel on the paths,
I followed for the strength
of life and grasp.
I have seen beautiful feet
but never beauty welded with strength.
I marvelled at your height.

You stood almost level
with the lance-bearers
and so slight
And I wondered as you clasped
your sholder-strap
at the strength of your wrist
and the turn of your young fingers,
and the lift of your shorn locks,
and the bronze
of your sun-burnt neck.....
and the sharp muscles of your back
which the tunic could not cover --
the outline
no garment could deface. 8

The second phase of H. D.'s development is within the confinements of Imagism itself. In this respect it has been from the short lyric to the long. Stated in another manner, it is her development from the use of the single image to the use

7. Collected Poems of H. D., page 15
8. Collected Poems of H. D., page 29.

of a succession of images.

"SEA ROSE" is one of her earliest and most simple Imagistic poems:

> Rose, harsh rose,
> marred and with stint of petals,
> meagre flower, thin,
> sparse of leaf,
> more precious
> than a wet rose
> single on a stem --
> you are caught in the drift.
>
> Stunted, with small leaf,
> you are flung on the sand,
> you are lifted
> in the crisp sand
> that drives in the wind. 9

Here is the second part of the poem GARDEN in which the poet's sensation of summer heat is perfectly communicated:

> O wind, rend open the heat,
> cut apart the heat,
> rend it to tatters.
>
> Fruit cannot drop
> through this thick air --
> fruit cannot fall into heat
> that presses up and blunts
> the points of pears
> and rounds the grapes.
>
> Cut the heat --
> plough through it,
> turning it on either side
> of your path. 10

The emotion of sensation here is no deeper nor more complex than the emotion of perception revealed in the lyric quoted previously. The poem - the above is but the second part of it - is merely longer. That is an interesting and

9. Collected Poems of H. D., page 5
10. Collected Poems of H. D., page 34

significant fact. Imagism as it is exemplified by H. D. the most perfect Imagist, has always remained narrow in scope, though the poems may be somewhat longer in her later books, the emotion sustained at greater length.

While these poems, and many others might be considered fragmantary, there is a completeness of thought and expression to SEA GODS that is noteworthy not only for that completeness, but also as it illustrates her use of the succession of images in securing a longer sustained emotion and a somewhat deeper realized though limited emotion.

They say there is no hope--
sand -- drift -- rocks -- rubble of the sea --
the broken hulk of a ship,
hung with shreds of rope,
pallid under the cracked pitch.

they say there is no hope to conjure you --
no whip of the tongue to anger you --
no hate of words
you must rise to refute....

But we bring violets,
great masses - single, sweet,
wood-violets, stream-violets,
violets from a wet marsh....
Yellow violets gold,
burnt with a rare tint -
violets like red ash
among tufts of grass....
We bring the hyacinth-violet,
sweet, bare, chill to the touch -
and violets whiter than the inrush
of your own white surf.

For you will come,
you will yet haunt men in ships...
you will answer our taut hearts,
you will break the lie of men's thoughts,
and cherish and shelter us. 11

11. Collected Poem of H. D., page 42

This was the ultimate that pure Imagism could work in the hands of H. D. And an image was not enough to create the emotion she presented. Rather she was compelled to use a succession of images. She transcended the written law, and yet there can be nowhere found a poem which better typifies the best that Imagism had to offer.

H. D. was recognized even by the Imagists themselves as the finest Imagist poet. Her language is clear-cut, concentrated. The poems themselves are as full of fragility and yet of strength as the beauty she presents. She possesses a hypersensitivity to beauty that at times almost overwhelms her.[12] "This beauty is too much for any woman".

While all other Imagists of note at some time wrote about Imagism, H. D. alone was silent, presenting her case for Imagism solely through her poetry. It reveals all of the best and most significant elements of the movement. There is this which should be said of her: she made Imagism. It had many adherents and a few very fine exemplifiers. But where others were, perhaps, from the movement, H. D was very decidedly more than the movement. She was not, as has been so commonly stated, the finest poet that Imagism produced; she was ( and though it might seem merely another manner of phraseology, it is a significant one) the finest poet that produced Imagistic poetry.

12. Collected poems of H. D., page 108

Her work in Imagism is best exemplified in the volumes SEA GARDEN, and THE GOD; though RED ROSES FOR BRONZE contains much that is purely and simply Imagistic.

Imagism as a movement dates from March, 1913 (when its case was first presented to the public through the medium of POETRY) to April, 1917, when the fourth and last real Imagist anthology was published. Since then Imagism as a movement, a conscious and deliberate movement, has not existed. It has exhausted itself. It was, in retrospect, no more than a revolt against the shallow but voluminous romanticism of its day. It offered nothing new, but much that had been long forgotten. The essential truths it recalled to prominence were more than mere Imagism, transcended it, and have found exemplification in the best poetry of the succeeding years. Imagism as a movement is quite definitely dead.

But what of H. D.? I say, as a mere Imagist she too is dead to all but the connoisseur. The highest tribute that can be paid to her in this respect is to say: H. D. will not be remembered because of her Imagism, but Imagism because of H. D.

# V

# THE CLASSICIST

## H.D. CLASSICIST

"Today? Yesterday? Greek time is like all Greek miracles. Years gain no permanence nor impermanence by a line of curious numbers....."1

H.D. in her earliest work was purely and simply Imagistic, there being but little reference to the Greek. However, as poem succeeded poem there was more and more explicit reference to things Grecian: the use of Greek themes, Greek names, Greek conceptions of art and beauty. It was no mere artificial, pedantic attitude and treatment that was involved, for this woman became literally suffused with the Hellenic spirit. In a world of superficialities, aimless gropings, and loud but somehow shallow poetry, she experienced the pangs of spiritual starvation. Her artistic nature demanded something steady, something utterly fine; and what had the present, the "lost generation", to offer? If it had anything, it was, nevertheless, not what she wanted.

But Imagism, whatever it immediate derivation, derived ultimately from Classicism. And H.D. found rather early in her poetic career that Classicism could and did satisfy her artistic longings. It was not that H.D. became a Classicist in the ultimate spiritual sense, but so far as her artistic perspective was concerned she did become definitely a Classicist. Pope, Milton, and America's Edward A. Robinson - to name but three - were Classicists; and yet their Classicism - or so it seems to me - was one of technique, of method only.

1. H.D., THE ION OF EURIPIDES, page 127.

There is more to that of H. D. There is a spiritual element, a philosophic attitude, that is certainly not American, not European; which is, if it has any affinity, Greek.

She has a spiritual kinship with the Hellenic artistic ideals; but at the same time, in the broader sense, no ultimate comprehension of Greek life. We cannot subjectively completely understand and appreciate an epoch, a world, that is no longer physically existent; we cannot truly become Greeks. Habits, customs, perspectives become hazy, meaningless, and, in whole or in part, lost, as year succeeds year, epoch supplants epoch. The most that any individual can do is to achieve that state of personality, perspective, and expression which a modern consciousness judges to be that of another, a past mode and philosophy of living and thinking. H. D. achieved this, and is therefore called a Greek. She is not of us, not of any generation or race other than what we and she consider Greek.

Where she became an Imagist through association with that group which took its name from its most flaunted tenet, she became a Classicist from temperament, from spirit. But what was it definitely that Hellenic culture held for her? .... An artistic ideal, Perfection! "For this new culture was content, as no culture had been before, or has been since, frankly with one and but one supreme quality, perfection." 2

And the Hellenic past held more than that, much more. The Greeks possessed a majectic simplicity. They realized the

2. H. D., The Ion of Euripides, page 123.

mysteries of the earth and in the earth. And H. D. was that much of a Greek before she became known to us as one. Let her speak of herself, of Classicism:

"They said:
she is high and far and blind
in her high pride,
but now that my head is bowed
in sorrow, I find
she is most kind.

We have taken life, they said,
blithely, not groped in a mist
for things that are not --
are if you will, but bloodless --
why ask happiness of the dead?
and my heart bled.

Ah, could they know
how violets throw strange fire,
red and purple and gold,
how they glow
gold and purple and red
where her feet tread." 3

It was the middle portion of her work, her middle period - the volumes, THE GOD, and HYMEN - in which she was so clearly a Classicist. Here her subjects are uniformly Greek - Adonis, Pygmalion, Eurydice, Demeter, Thetis, Leda, Evadne, Helios. And these gods, these people are not dead, but temporarily resurrected. They are living, vital; for they are Greek and she is Greek, and she is living actively in the past with them, or (shall we say?) they are living in the present with her.

There is a method through which she makes this true. For example; Thetis is not written about, she speaks for herself - for H. D. impersonates Thetis. The poet performs the double task of being (if the contradiction of terms will be permitted) objectively subjective. It is a part of her general method,

3. Collected poems of H. D., page 234.

this identification of self with the subject of a particular poem. The poem THETIS follows:

"He had asked for immortal life
in the old days and had grown old,
now he had aged apace,
he asked for his youth,
and I, Thetis, granted him

freedom under the sea
drip and welter of weeds,
and drift of the fringing grass,
the gift of the never-withering moss,
and the flowering reed,

and most,
beauty of fifty nereids,
sisters of nine,
I one of their least,
yet great and a goddess,
granted Pelius,

love under the sea,
beauty, grace infinite..." 4

It is, perhaps, time that we turn to the more technical and obvious elements of Classicism which H. D.'s work evidences. Immediately the question arises, "Just what is Classicism?" There are certain statements which help to explain it, either in whole or in part.

1. The fundamental Classical impulse is moderation.

2. "In Classicism an age of understanding and refinement severely asserts its rights: and excludes whatever cannot be brought to its test; all that is obscure, redundant or defective, too prominent or too unobtrusive for its part, or which suggests undignified or repellent association. Unity of form is blended with eclecticism in subject..." 5

4. Collected poems of H. D., page 234
5. Romantic and Classical Styles, by Herford, page 80/

5. " Classicism is the detached and balanced presentation of life, the relation of values irrespective of temperament and personal philosophy, the subordination of the artist's own emotions and moral purposes to the form and reality of his own creation." 6

These statements concerning Classicism serve to show the fundamental elements of it. The Classical artist maintains a consciously directed discipline upon his subject.

But, in addition, let there be noted these tenets of Imagism: poetry that contains the exact word, that is hard and clear, that does not deal in vague generalities, that illustrates the principle that concentration is the very essence of poetry. Disregard the matter of the image and there is a rather close relationship between Imagism and Classicism. And just as the tenets of Imagism made it necessary that the Imagist be a master of the English language, so Classicism necessitates it.

From a practical standpoint it is impossible to distinguish the point at which H.D. ceased to be purely and simply an Imagist and became a Classicist. It was a gradual process in line with her development as an Imagist. This does not mean to say that she abandoned entirely the use of the image; it does mean,however, that she became less dependent on it as a sole means of presentation. The Imagist credo reads in part, "To present an image." In reality that means to present through an image. H.D. as a Classicist does not in this manner limit her mode of

6. H.P. Collins, Modern Poetry, page 100.

presentation. For example, these stanzas from the poem "Circe":

"It is easy enough to call men
from the edges of the earth.
It is easy enough to summon them to my feet
with a thought --
it is beautiful to see the tall panther
and the sleek deer-hounds
circle in the dark.
But I would give up
rock-fringes of coral
and the inmost chamber
of my island palace
and my own gifts
and the whole region
of my power and magic
for your glance." 7

This poem illustrates more than one important fact. As an Imagist H. D. presented the flowers, the rocks, the sea etc, and seldom did she deal with personalities. But as a Classicist she is concerned with people, real and imaginary, with thoughts, and with legends. Her field is broader, deeper, and more demanding here. The necessity for something more than or something besides, Imagism was due to subject matter, in this respect.

What I am trying to show is that H. D., having become a Classicist, did not therefore cease to be an Imagist. Her use of the image continued, though with less frequency and with more skill. The image was not "the all in all" as Imagism inevitably demanded, it was no more than a part (though a very fine part) of her poetic equipment.

H. D. is a particular kind of Classicist in more ways than one. Her artistic range, her artistic philosophy are Classical in so far as an acceptable international use of that term is concerned. But her Classicism is greater than this because she

7. Collected Poems of H. D., page 172.

is not only Classical so far as method is concerned, but Greek in spirit. On the other hand, her observations are essentially emotional, and her Classicism technically results from her impersonal and detached manner.

More definitely, the following poem is illustrative of this phase of H. D.'s work, containing as it does the most characteristic elements of her Classicism:

Evadne

I first tasted under Apollo's lips
love and love sweetness,
I Evadne;
my hair is made of crisp violets
or hyacinth which the wind combs back
across some rock shelf;
I Evadne
was mate of the god of light.

His hair was crisp to my mouth
as the flower of the crocus,
across my cheek,
cool as the silver cress
on Eroto's bank;
between my chin and throat
his mouth slipped over and over.

Still between my arm and shoulder,
I feel the brush of his hair,
and my hands keep the gold they took
as they wandered over and over
that great arm-full of yellow flowers. 8

Exactly what the poem conveys is, perhaps, irrelevant; for that which I find specifically may be something other than what another finds. But that a feeling of aesthetic delight, to a greater or lesser degree, in an almost supernatural beauty is aroused, cannot be denied.

8. Collected Poems of H. D., page 193.

Whether or not the poem is significant is quite a different matter. H. P. Collins has this to say of EVADNE:

> "But I doubt if one might not claim for EVADNE a more truly classical tone, a nearer approximation to the classical ideals of detachment, restraint, calmness, moderation and balance than for most ancient - and so "a fortiori" most modern - literary expression of similar scope. That its technical method is most purely and intensely classical seems to me to admit of no doubt. It is only one out of many poems by H. D. that share the same qualities; but if this much may be conceded to EVADNE, to which I am convinced that no modern writer has produced a resemblance either in spirit or method; then no critic who is not ready positively to maintain, and demonstrate, that EVADNE is an insignificant poem can deny a real importance to such uniqueness." 9

It has been said that H. D. is so thoroughly Greek that she has been able to use the exclamation "heu" without exciting comment. Professor Fairclough says of her:

> "Indeed, a Greek scholar, after a perusal of her work, cannot but conclude that in Greek poetry and art H. D. lives and moves and has her being. So completely is she suffused with the Greek spirit that only the use of the vernacular will often remind the cultivated reader that he is not reading a Greek poet." 10

But, while the concern so far in the consideration of H. D.'s Classicism has been with poetry that is essentially objective, there is a further phase of her Classicism which is intrinsically subjective, and which may best be designated as her "personalism". It was only in her classical poetry that she could indulge in purely subjective expression, since Imagism condemned poetry that was subjective -- indeed, "personalism" was that which the Imagists most feared.

This personal poetry, which is found for the most part in the HELIODORA volume, is marked by much the same characteristics

9. H. P. Collins, Modern Poetry, page 194
10. H. R. Fairclough, The Classics and Our Twentieth-Century Poets, p. 52

as is that phase of her Classicism which is objective in spirit and treatment. It contains these elements; the use of the physical image, though here less prevalent; continued avoidance of super-imposed phrasing, which is external to pure emotional liberation. There is always the impression of restraint, aided in part by her use of the exact word, and in part by her free verse cadence. But the distinctive quality of this particular phase of her Classicism is its spirit, a richness and expansiveness of personal feeling which is given additional strength by her consumate technical instincts.

Always in both H. D.'s Imagistic poetry and objective Classical poetry there was an unvritten note of spiritual longing -- for what it was not entirely clear; but it seemed to be a longing for perfection, the overwhelming beauty and strength of spiritual perfection. But the unwritten song could only be vaguely felt, never completely realized by the reader. So there came insistently the apparently unanswerable question, "What is in this woman?" But the unanswerable becomes, I think, somewhat answered through the personal poetry of the HELIODORA volume.

Those possessing what is most commonly termed a romantic strain have ever found in "love" their greatest subject, and this was no less true of H. D. And in keeping with her usual attitude she turns for inspiration often to the Hellenic past. Thus Sappho becomes one of her chief sources of inspiration.

Frequently H. D. takes Sapphic fragments reworking them freely and in impassioned vein.

Fragment Forty

Love . . . bitter-sweet.
--Sappho

Ah, love is bitter and sweet,
but which is more sweet,
the sweetness
or the bitterness?
none has spoken it.

Love is bitter,
but can salt taint sea-flowers,
grief, happiness?

Is it bitter to give back
love to your lover
if he crave it?

Is it bitter to give back
love to your lover
if he crave it
for a new favorite?
who can say,
or is it sweet?

Is it sweet
to possess utterly?
or is it bitter,
bitter as ash? 1

There is a hesitant note, a note of unsureness here which is traceable to H. D.'s long accustomed restraint. Her technical skill is none the less clearly apparent, as apparent as the poem's surging power of personal feeling. And yet, from some predetermined but unexplained point of view the statement has been made, "The verses of the once 'burning Sappho' have become 'Frozen fire'". 2 'But since H. D. in this poem and others of Sapphic inspiration deals merely with fragments which are

1. Collected Poems of H. D., page 256.
2. H. R. Fairclough, The Classics and Our Twentieth Century Poets page 52

certainly not 'molten fire', we could say, and not without some justification, "In comparison with what?"

It might be argued that this phase of H. D.'s Classicism, her "personalism", is not truly subjective. It might be argued that the poems are objective, that here too H. D. has taken themes that so far as she herself is concerned are not personal, but which she develops as though she were the character her poetic mind conceives. But at least it would have to be admitted that this poetry is different, that here another phase of her poetic personality is revealed. Before there was always a definite personality, either real or legendary, that H. D. impersonated. And though it may seem to be further begging of the question, how can such poems as IN THE RAIN and CHANCE MEETING be explained in such a manner. By far the better solution would seem to be that H. D. is speaking for and of H. D.

In the love poems called TOWARD THE PIRAEUS she strikes a deeply personal note:

> If I had been a boy,
> I would have worshipped your grace
> I would have flung my worship
> before your feet,
> I would have followed apart,
> glad, rent with an ecstasy
> to watch you turn
> your great head, set on the throat,
> thick, dark with its sinews,
> burned and wrought
> like the olive stalk,
> and the noble chin
> and the throat.

I would have stood,
and watched and watched
and burned,
and when in the night,
from the many hosts, your slaves,
and warriors and serving men
you had turned
to the purple couch and the flame
of the woman, tall like the cypress tree
that flames sudden and swift and free
as with crackle of golden resin
and cones and the locks flung free
like the cypress limbs,
bound, caught and shaken and loosed,
bound, caught and riven and bound
and loosened again,
as in rain of a kingly storm
or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen
from all the lethargy of love and its heat,
you would have summoned me,
me alone,
and found my hands,
beyond all the hands in the world,
cold, cold, cold,
intolerably cold and sweet. 3

As a more direct example of her "personalism" I include here a poem which is an expression of her distaste for the modern world and also of her wonder at the miracle of the love of person and of interests which she shared with Aldington (a love which in the first particular at least has since failed).

We Two

We two are left:
I with small grace reveal
distaste and bitterness;
you with small patience
take my hands.....

3. Collected Poems of H. D., page 259

We two are left:
as a blank wall, the world,
earth and the men who talk,
saying their space of life
is good and gracious,
with eyes blank
as that blank surface
their ignorance mistakes
for final shelter
and a resting-place.

We two remain:
yet by what miracle,
searching within the tangles of my brain,
I ask again,
have we two met within
this maze of daedal paths
in-wound mid grievous stone,
where once I stood alone? 4

Such poems suffice to show the tremendous meaning that love had for H. D. Not that love was the only subject for her "personalism", but it was the predominant one. As in art, so in love she sought perfection, the ideal of spiritual union. These were her cries in the wilderness of sophisticated materialism.

HELIODORA was full of the promise of what could be in her next volume of poetry. It came, RED ROSES FOR BRONZE, in 1931. But the promise was not fulfilled. There were Imagistic and Classical poems, but her "personalism" for the most part was a specious sort, and none of the poetry was equal to the best of her previous work.

Much attention and space have been given here to the "personalism" of H. D. In view of the fact that this phase of her Classicism is so small in amount and so unmastered in

4. Collected Poems of H. D., page 241

comparison with her other work it might seem too much, more than is necessary or worthwhile. But some justification may lie in the fact that this phase of her Classicism and of H. D. is an intensely interesting and enlightening phase of her work, revealing more of the poet directly than all the rest of her poetry.

But even more than this, though slight and limited in scope, it is among the finest poetry that she has produced. It has a richness and expansiveness of feeling, a technically produced tension, and withal a restraint that keeps it from becoming sentimental. The essence of the matter probably lies in the fact that she is consciously and purposefully revealing herself. Her "personalism" is unquestionably a notable phase of her distinguished Classicism.

The significance of H. D.'s Classicism aside from purely personal interests is, I think, nil. For a few, those demanding classical standards for poetry, and those rarer few who by temperament are able to share that intense love for things Greek so deeply instilled in her, H. D. has tremendous significance. Her technique was classical, and superimposed upon that was her Greek milieu. Being so utterly individual, she permits of no followers, no imitators. As a Classicist, she has not had, and apparently will not have, any influence on the course of poetry. Perhaps that is unfortunate.

# VI

# H.D.'s TRANSLATIONS

## TRANSLATIONS

In her translations as elsewhere H. D. evinces an immitigable skill. Indeed, it has been said that her reputation is greatest for her translations. But to point to any particular part of her work and say that upon this or that her reputation rests is a questionable act of judgment. For that matter, one might go so far as to say that her translations are not such at all, that she merely uses sources as inspirations for poetry that is entirely her own. However, there are essentially three kinds of translations:

1. That which is as accurate a reproduction of the letter of the original as possible.
2. That which reproduces the spirit of the original with no invention of being merely a literal translation.
3. That which is an outright recreation from the original material, and which is the expression of a new temperament.

The translations of H.D. fall very definitely into the third category. She makes no attempt at being merely literal; rather, she gives us something that is living and vital, bearing undeniablely the impress of her own personality. All apparent errors and omissions in her translations are not really such, for mere literalism is never intended.

H.D.'s method in translation does not deviate from that of her entirely original work, though it might be felt that

here her method is even more extreme. There is a stark directness to her presentations, the aesthetic appeal being conveyed by a minimum of obvious effort. For example, there follows a passage from the ION OF EURIPIDES:

> Are you mad?
> What priest
> dare invoke,
> in his house,
> a voice,
> to speak judgment
> on him,
> whom the augurors
> worship?
> have you lost
> all sense of yourself?
> do you think
> we may challenge the god,
> and here, in his very-house? 1

The Choruses from the IPHIGENIA in AULIS and the HIPPOLYTUS of Euripides are not particularly awe-inspiring though each contains some unforgettable passages. Perhaps the outstanding fact about them is the excellence of the character drawing. The language is almost too self-contained emotionally - a fact generally true of all H.D.'s poetry, and which has given rise to the criticism that she gives her actors no work to do. However, here are some of the finer passages from these translations:

> If a god should stand there
> He could not speak
> At the sight of ships
> Circled with ships.
>
> This beauty is too much
> For any woman.
> It is burnt across my eyes. 2

1. H.D., ION OF EURIPIDES, page 56
2. H.D., IPHIGENIA IN AULIS, page 108.

And again:

> I have heard --
> I myself have seen the floating ships
> And nothing will ever be the same --
> The shouts,
> The harrowing voices within the house.
> I stand apart with an army:
> My mind is graven with ships. 3

By far the best of her translations is that which was published in 1937, the ION OF EURIPIDES. This was also the only complete Greek drama that H.D. has translated. The translation is gripping in its tremendous intensity due largely to the completeness of her language, and to the aforementioned starkness of her presentation in translations. She says of her method here:

> The broken, exclamatory or evocative vers-libre which I have chosen to translate the two-line dialogue, throughout the play, is the exact antithesis of the original. Though concentrating and translating sometimes, ten words, with two, I have endeavored, in no way, to depart from the meaning..... The original reads as sustained narrative. 4

By way of illustration of this point, there follows a conversation between Ion and Kreousa, while Kreousa crouches on the altar steps in the temple of Phoibos fearing death at Ion's hand:

> Kreousa - I am safe with the god;
> Ion - what is the god to you?
> Kreousa - my body is his, by right;
> Ion - who would have killed his priest;
> Kreousa - you are your father's, not his;
> Ion - I was always his near-son;
> Kreousa - you were - but my day has come;
> Ion - you are his in crime, I, in beauty;
> Kreousa - I fought the enemy of my own city;
> Ion - I came, didn't I, with a mighty army? 5

3. H.D., IPHIGENIA IN AULIS, page 112.
4. H.D., ION OF EURIPIDES, page 53
5. H.D., " " " , page 101

Various critics have remarked on the fact that the irony so characteristic of Euripides is always lacking in H.D.'s translations of his works. In the notes accompanying this translation she comes to her own defense:

> In spite of the so-called rationalists, and the much quoted critic with his 'irony is lurking at every corner', I prefer to believe that the poet speaks through his boy-priest, Ion, with his own vibrant superabundance of ecstasy before a miracle; the sun rises. 6

This translation with notes is, perhaps, more interesting for the notes than for the play. But let this not detract from the play itself; it is made only because because in these notes we find - a rare occasion - H.D. speaking and revealing herself. All the unutterable longing for that lost time (lost to us) that she has built up again in her mind, recreated in all its glory, that "greatest aesthetic miracle of all time, welding of beauty and strength, the absolute achievement of physical perfection by the spirit of man"[7], all this is summed up for her in the one word, Ion. As nowhere else, these notes make that entirely clear.

When the work of H.D. is finally estimated, attention must be given to her translations. This very fact will undoubtedly gain for her a higher place in the field of literature than would otherwise be possible. She is, if any individual ever was, a truly inspired translator.

6. H.D., ION OF EURIPIDES, page 10.
7. H.D., " " " , page 127.

# VII

# OTHER WORK BY H.D.

## OTHER WORK by H.D.

In 1927 was published H.D.'s only long and original verse drama, HIPPOLYTUS TEMPORIZES.[1] In spirit it is essentially Greek. However, this effort cannot compare with ION, a later work and a translation. Her typical method in drama, that of very stark presentation, is also used here. The play is interesting only in so far as it is unusual, an oddity really, and it must be relegated to a minor position among her works.

In the field of prose she has written two pieces, HEDYLUS[2] and PALIMPSEST[3], which have but one distinguishing characteristic - that they could have been written by no one else. One might say, as Alfred Kreymborg has said, "The stories are written not in prose, but in prose poetry, in a style clearly her own."[4] PALIMPSEST, her first prose effort, is divided into three parts: "Hipparchia", which deals with war in Rome( 75 B.C.); "Murex", which deals with War and post-War London(1916 - 1920); and the "Secret Name " which concerns the excavator's Egypt(1925). Hedylus, on the other hand, is a story of ancient Greece.

Neither work has any particular value. Perhaps in all fairness it would be best to say that her prose efforts are merely experimental. At any rate they evince none of that concentration which is so characteristic of her poetry. They very apparently

1. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927.
2. " , " " " , 1928.
3. " , " " " , 1926.
4. Alfred Kreymborg, Our Singing Strength, page 547.

meander along, and at length. This, in turn, may be due (and so it seems to me) to the fact that what she has to offer is too thin, too limited, to warrant the somewhat long treatment given in each case.

# VIII

# CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

The poetry of H. D. has been called stiff, cold, sterile. One critic has even gone so far as to say that it is essentially empty. If only her purely Imagistic poetry was being considered there might be some point to all this. But the great number of other lyrics, especially those of the HELIODORA volume! Such criticism can be only the result of a failure to "get" H. D. The fault lies not entirely with the poet, for it is after all a matter of "getting" any poet. No amount of technical analysis can enable a reader to do this; it is a matter of catching spiritual vibrations.

For H. D. beauty is set apart. That is her constant theme, sometimes explicitly, generally implicitly, stated. She has created a world all to herself, and one cannot force an entrance into it. Yet that world can slowly but inevitably encompass one's whole vision. "Beauty is set apart." The reader must set himself apart from all his world before her's can take him in. But finally between poet and reader there is little or no distinction, and her realization is no more than that of the reader.

If one word could be used to sum up all her poetry that word would be "beauty". But - "beauty is set apart". So this poetry of H. D. is set apart. And as one must seek beauty only with enchanted eyes, so too must one seek H. D.

Few lyric poets have succeeded so well in voicing pure

ecstasy. In the creation of beauty that literally chokes in its sheer loveliness, H. D. admits of no superior, nor even an equal, among American poets. It is part of herself, of her very nature, that she gives us, evincing a loveliness of spirit which helps relieve the oppressing pessimism of the modern world. Who else could realize "how violets throw strange fire"?

In all probability H.D. will ultimately be classed as a minor poet. Not that technically she has many if any faults, but the matter of her poetry fails to arouse widespread appreciation. The outstanding weakness of her poetry is that it is touched with a temperamental love of flowers, which is not common to most of us. Yet it is ironic that this woman who is the greatest Imagist, the greatest Classicist, the most inspired translator, who has been present in America must be recognized only as a minor poet. Perhaps the answer is contained in that sentence; she has been only physically present, spiritually she has been of another world.

So I may say,
"I died of living,
having lived one hour";

so they may say,
"she died soliciting
illicit fervour";

so you may say,
"Greek flower; Greek ecstasy
reclaims forever

one who died
following
intricate songs' lost measure." 1

1. H. D., Red Roses For Bronze, page 89.

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

## I. The Works of H.D.

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