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**The “silent dialogue”: Parallel Trajectories of H.D.’s and Adrienne Rich’s
Poetic Treatment of Patriarchal Violence**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Adrienne Rich (1929-) is one of the foremost contemporary American poets. Her first volume of poetry was published in 1951, and she remains a leading poetic voice today. Her career has been one of remarkable change: her early formalist work gave way to the androgynous, “humanist” writings of the early 1970’s, the consciously lesbian works of the late 1970’s, and finally to a poetics concerned with the marginalization of a myriad of social groups. Rich has contributed to the realms of poetry, prose, and political feminism and served as an inspiration for a generation of women poets. But Rich herself drew upon a legacy of earlier women poets, including the modernist poet H.D. (1886-1961). The poetic works of Rich and H.D. follow a parallel trajectory in terms of their treatment of patriarchal violence: early in their careers, both Rich and H.D. wrote poems that veiled personal experiences of male violence and exclusion under a veneer of propriety and stylized verse. These early poems display a shared adherence to male, canonical influences (Pound and D.H. Lawrence for H.D.; Frost and Auden for Rich) and to the tutelage of domineering fathers. Both women become more open in their treatment of this theme after involvement with male violence as it is manifested in war. H.D. survived the London bombings, and Rich was very active in the Vietnam protest movement.

In the late 1970’s, these parallel trajectories intersect in ways that have not been fully addressed in scholarship on the two writers. Rich has acknowledged that her radical feminist collection, *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) was engaged in a “silent dialogue” with H.D. (Rich “Reply” 735). Rich’s unpublished teaching notes from the late 1970’s, housed at the Schlesinger Library, also include significant evidence that Rich was deeply interested in H.D.’s poetry during the period in which *DCL* was written.

Textual evidence from Rich's poetry and prose works of the late 1970's and early 1980's further support the connection between H.D.'s work and the poetry in *DCL* and, additionally, bear out the claim that H.D. remained important for Rich's subsequent collection, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981) in ways which scholars, and even Rich herself, have not fully acknowledged.

Like two parallel lines, the treatment of male violence in the poetry of Rich and H.D. began as hidden allusions to personal experiences with patriarchal violence (as is manifested through restrictive cultural norms) and burgeoned into a more comprehensive indictment of male violence as it is manifested in war and other more traditional forms of violence. But in the mid-1980's, Rich's poetic career shifted, and H.D.'s works became of lesser importance to her. Rich's increased focus on issues of racial, socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, and sexual marginalization took her interests beyond those of H.D., whose social critiques were limited generally to issues of gender and sexual orientation.

The biographies of H.D. and Rich are similar in ways which warrant attention, if only because their personal lives had important implications for their early poetry. To begin with the later poet, Adrienne Rich began her literary career at a young age. Born in 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland, to an educated, Jewish father and a musical, gentile mother, Rich was raised as her father's literary protégé (Keyes 1). She was schooled at home until the fourth grade, and later was instructed in her father's "very Victorian, pre-Raphaelite" library from which she read works by Tennyson, Keats, Arnold, Blake, Rossetti, Swinburne, Carlyle and Pater (Martin 167; Gelpi and Gelpi 424). Arnold Rich encouraged his daughter's early poetic efforts, and Rich describes how she was "raised as a son, taught to study but not to pray, taught to hold reading and writing sacred"

(Keyes 1). Her first poetry volume, *A Change of World*, was deeply indebted to her father's strict instruction and the canonical male writers that dominated her schooling. Published in 1951, while she was a senior at Radcliffe College, this first collection was selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets Award. Rich was one of the few women Auden selected for this honor, and he praised "Miss Rich" for her craftsmanship, in which he saw "evidence of a capacity for detachment from the self and its emotion without which no art is possible" (10). He concludes his foreword to *A Change of World* with the assertion that "the poems a reader will encounter in this book are neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs" (11).

This first volume—and her second, *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* (1955)—were both highly formalist. As Cheri Langdell notes, "[Rich's] first books were full of literary allusions and classical reserve... she herself has openly acknowledged the impact of Robert Frost, and more important, Wallace Stevens" (16). Both of these early collections were published under the poet's full name—Adrienne Cecile Rich—a subtle affectation that was abandoned in her later works. Rich would later look back on this period of her life in her 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" to acknowledge the advantages she was afforded "being born white and middle class into a house full of books, with a father that encouraged me to read and write," but also to note that, "for about twenty years I wrote for a particular man, who criticized and praised me and made me feel that I was indeed 'special.'... I tried for a long time to please him, or rather, not to displease him. And then of course there were other men—writers, teachers—the Man, who was not a terror or a dream but a literary master" (Rich *LSS* 38-

39). In his generally positive review of *The Diamond Cutters* in the 1956 issue of *Poetry*, Donald Hall wryly comments that “it is easy to greet several of her poems with familiarity: ‘How do you do, Mr. Frost? And you, Mr. Auden?’” (301). Hall notes Rich’s significant debt to the formalism championed by Frost and Auden, but he also praises her “precision and frequent profundity” (302).

Additionally, Hall included several of Rich’s poems in the 1957 anthology *The New Poets of England and America* which he co-edited with Robert Pack and Louis Simpson. This rather conservative anthology was countered three years later by the much more radical collection—Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry*—which included poetry from the Beats, the Black Mountain College poets, and other radical figures. As Christopher MacGowan notes, “the Hall/Pack/Simpson anthology and Allen’s three years later revealed a split in conceptions of the most significant new American poetry, between the more formal poets of the 1957 volume and the more radical poets of Allen’s collection. An introduction by Robert Frost set the tone for the 1957 volume while Charles Olson was a major advisor to Allen” (296). While Rich’s work appeared in the 1957 volume, it was not included in Allen’s anthology. At this point in her career, her poetry was closer to the spirit of the earlier anthology, but as Langdell explains, “as [Rich] matures as a poet, gradually she aligns herself more and more with the ‘American regenerative’ tradition—the open forms of H.D., William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Charles Olson... and Walt Whitman” (16-17). H.D., as one of the few women poets in this group, held special importance for Rich’s later career.

H.D. was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1886, and like Rich was born to an artistic mother and a learned father who took a keen interest in his daughter’s education.

The lead astronomy professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Flower Observatory, Professor Doolittle wanted his daughter to excel in the sciences. However, H.D. showed little aptitude for math or science; she enrolled at Bryn Mawr College in 1905, but, having failed a math course, she withdrew after three terms. (Friedman *Psyche* 26; DuPlessis *Career* xix). H.D. often felt ignored by her mother, and in her quasi-autobiographical *End to Torment* (written in 1959 and published posthumously in 1979), she admitted that "my older brother was my mother's favorite; I, my father's. But the mother is the Muse, the Creator, and in my case especially as my mother's name was Helen" (41). Interestingly, both Rich and H.D.'s mothers were named Helen, and both poets acknowledged associating their mothers with Helen of Troy (H.D. *Tribute* 43-44; Rich *OWB* 219-220). H.D.'s relationship with her mother would later be the subject of much of her psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud.

From 1905-1908, H.D. had been engaged on and off to Ezra Pound, but the couple never married (Silverstein 32). In 1910, H.D. met Frances Gregg, a woman for whom she harbored intense desire, until Gregg became involved with Pound. This "parallel and competing love" for Gregg was H.D.'s first experience with lesbian passion, and Gregg and H.D. travelled to Europe together (Silverstein 33). In 1912, Gregg married, and the following year H.D. married fellow poet Richard Aldington. H.D.'s earliest volume of poetry, *Sea Garden*, was published in 1916 (Silverstein 35). These poems are typical of H.D.'s Imagist period, and were highly influenced by Pound's theories of imagism. In fact, it was Pound who christened the budding poet Hilda Doolittle "H.D." as he scrawled "H.D., *Imagiste*" on her *Sea Garden* manuscripts. Pound, Lawrence and H.D.'s husband Aldington, served as poetic mentors and editors

during this early period in her career. In these first poems, as Albert Gelpi has pointed out, “Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, and D.H. Lawrence were powerful but threatening presences” in much the same way that the voices of “Mr. Frost” and “Mr. Auden” were discernible influences on Rich’s early works (“Re-Membering” 318).

These early personal similarities are mirrored by several similarities in H.D. and Rich’s early poetry. In her early poems Rich explores the stultification that she sees as inherent in conventional women’s roles. This may not seem to be a condemnation of violence in the traditional sense, but Rich’s poems present an image of the violence inherent in a system which insidiously denies women’s importance and equality. “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers,” the second poem in her inaugural collection, details the free and fierce tigers of Aunt Jennifer’s embroidery, contrasting them with “the massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band” which “sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer’s hand” (Rich *Change* 19). Rich presents the image of her dead aunt, whose “terrified hands” will remain “ringed with ordeals she was mastered by” (19). Two years after graduation, Rich married the young Harvard economics professor Alfred Conrad, and her poetry continued to reflect the sense of stifled potential, frustration and guilt that Rich attributed to the poisonous patriarchal system (Langdell 21).

The couple lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1953 to 1966, and there Rich gave birth to three sons, born in 1955, 1957 and 1959 (Gelpi and Gelpi 424). Throughout the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, Rich struggled to balance her often conflicting roles as mother/wife and poet/artist. She continued to write, and in the early 1960’s she resumed travelling abroad, winning a number of prestigious grants: a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel to the Netherlands in 1961, a Bollingen Foundation

Grant in 1962 and the Amy Lowell Travelling Fellowship also in 1962 (Gelpi and Gelpi 424). But though she was able to pursue her increasingly successful literary career, Rich later wrote of the guilt she experienced while balancing the dual role of artist and mother. In her later prose collection *Of Woman Born* (1976), she explores this guilt, arguing that, “for centuries, women have felt their active, creative impulses as a kind of demonic possession. But no less have men identified and punished such impulses as demonic” (Rich *OWB* 54).

This tension and guilt that Rich felt is a central issue in her third volume of poetry, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954-1962* (1963). In the title poem, Rich asserts that “a thinking woman sleeps with monsters (*Doorframe*, 18). Rich clearly identifies herself with this “thinking woman,” and the “monsters” which haunt her sleep are innately tied to the idea that female creativity is somehow “demonic.” “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” is Rich’s first poem to detail the “conundrum of the female artist in a society that defines self-denial as synonymous with true womanhood” (Martin 168). Rich ironically invokes masculine depictions of women—Diderot’s claim that all women “die at fifteen” and Samuel Johnson’s quip that “a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all”—while simultaneously forging a sense of solidarity between herself and other women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and Emily Dickinson (*Doorframe* 17-21).

In “Snapshots,” she illustrates what she sees as the invidious nature of patriarchal violence and the numbness it inspires: “sometimes she’s let the tapstream scald her arm, / a match burn to her thumbnail / or held her hand above the kettle’s snout / right in the

wooly steam” but “nothing hurts her anymore, except / each morning’s grit blowing into her eyes” (17-18). The woman in “Snapshots” is so wholly divorced from herself that the poem is rendered only in the third person. The title of the poem and the collection draws attention to the ways in which women are defined in relation to men: as daughters-in-law, they are legally bound to their husband’s family. This legalistic, detached approach signals the isolation and disconnect that, Rich argues, characterizes many women’s lives. In another poem of the collection, “A Marriage in the ‘Sixties” Rich addresses her husband, comparing their early, giddy love to “today” when “we stalk / in the raging desert of our thought” (14-15). These early poems detail the way that male violence is manifested in the home—in the squelched potential of women, in the intense cultural pressure to adhere to gender norms and the guilt that accompanies deviance from those norms, and in ways that literary and social norms have silenced the voices of women ranging from Dickinson to the “thinking woman” who sleeps with monsters.

H.D.’s poetry also portrays the violence inherent in her personal relations with men. However, unlike Rich’s poetry in which these themes are to the fore, H.D. “encodes” her poetry in symbolism and Greek mythical allusion. Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D.’s close friend, adviser, and literary executor, observed that H.D. “has been so praised as a kind of Greek publicity girl that people have forgotten that she writes the most intensely personal poems using Greek myth as a metaphor. That is, she can say these things better and more frankly about herself using these other devices than she could if she simply said ‘I,I,I’” (Baccolini 146). *Sea Garden* often employs these mythical masks or simply invokes a dichotomous “I/you” relationship in which the “I”

will often be an inanimate object or a generalized archetype. These are also forms of “masks” that H.D. dons in order to explore her personal experiences.

In “Mid-Day,” a poem from *Sea Garden*, the speaker is vulnerable and exposed, “a split cracked leaf” upon whom the hot mid-day sun beats relentlessly (*Collected* 10). She cries out, “I am anguished—defeated” and invokes a dichotomous relationship between the “I” and “you” of the poem. The speaker claims that “I perish on the path” whereas “O poplar, you are great / among the hill-stones” (10). Though not specifically gendered, the poplar’s overwhelming strength and vitality in the face of the speaker’s suffering and defeat certainly indicates that the poplar is meant to suggest the empowered male, perhaps even as a phallic symbol. The same elusive, powerful “you” characterizes “Garden,” which also appears in H.D.’s earliest volume. The initial line establishes the strength and power of this “you” as the speaker states, “you are clear, / O rose, cut in rock, / hard as the descent of hail” and the speaker laments that, “If I could break you / I could break a tree. / If I could stir / I could break a tree— / I could break you” (24-25). She then calls on the wind to “rend open the heat, / cut apart the heat, / rend it to tatters.” The oppressive heat, which is “thick” and “presses up,” “blunt[ing]” the fruit around it, is the source of the speaker’s inability to “stir” (25). Unable to move or stir in this stifling heat, the speaker cannot break the hold which the ambiguous “you” holds over her. Again, as in “Mid-Day,” the you/I dichotomy is not given specific gender, but the association between “you” with hard symbols of “rock” and “hail” and the implicit connection between the oppressed “I” who cannot stir and the stifled, blunted, overripe fruit again indicate a likely gender divide.

H.D.'s next volume, *Hymen*, published in 1921, was written with the backdrop of WWI, the collapse of her marriage, the infidelity of Aldington and H.D. herself, and the psychic breakdown triggered by her birth of a stillborn child. Written amidst these turbulent emotional events, the poem "Leda" helps to illustrate H.D.'s relationship with patriarchal violence. Lawrence Rainey's essay, "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D." argues that H.D.'s "Leda" is a continuation of the Victorian tendency to aestheticize rape scenes. By categorizing her with the Victorians, Rainey contradicts feminist scholar Susan Stanford Friedman's contention that H.D.'s omission of the rape/violence usually central to the Leda story "reverses centuries of literary and artistic tradition" (Rainey 112). Though Friedman's claim certainly is exaggerated, Rainey's argument that H.D.'s poem "aestheticizes" the scene in the mode of Victorian "decorative conventions" is a reductive treatment of the complex poem.

The events of H.D.'s personal life help to explain the strange ambivalence of "Leda." "Leda" was published in the 1921 volume *Hymen*, but it first appeared in the July 1919 *Chapbook*, a London publication dedicated to poetry and the arts (Boughn 97). The dating is important when viewed in conjunction with the events of April 1919—the month in which H.D.'s husband Richard Aldington spurned her and rejected the daughter, Perdita, she had borne from an affair. H.D. later wrote to Pound that, "I put down a lot of myself after Perdita's birth. I loved Richard very much and you know he threatened to use Perdita to divorce me and to have me locked up if I registered her as legitimate" (Friedman *Psyche* 27). H.D.'s divorce papers corroborate this sense of powerlessness that H.D. felt. H.D. and Aldington did not divorce until 1938, though they had separated weeks after Perdita's birth in 1919. In one 1937 document marked

“burn,” H.D. details Aldington’s 1919 threats that if she filed for divorce, the court would take Perdita from her and sentence her to years of “penal servitude” as punishment for her adultery with Cecil Gray (Beinecke Manuscripts Folder 1201). She wrote to others that this fear dissuaded her from seeking a divorce, effectively silencing her in the face of Aldington’s rejection. These events suggest that “Leda” relates not only to the traditional Greek myth, but also the tangled emotions of rejection, love, and illegitimate childbirth that characterized this period of H.D.’s life.

Viewed in this light, the lily is not a decorated adornment as Rainey suggests, but neither is it a refutation of century-old portrayals of Leda’s fate as Friedman argues. Instead, it is a woman who has been seduced by Zeus and enjoyed blissful moments in his “kingly kiss,” but who is also the victim of great harm at his hands. The poem intertwines words which suggest impending danger—repetition of “slow” and “slowly” foster anticipation for the violence foreshadowed in the title—with images of sexual fulfillment and “bliss.” These in turn are intricately tied to H.D.’s own conflicting sense of love, betrayal, anguish, and anger at Aldington. “Leda” is not a poem of convention or of sweeping historical scope; it is on one level a deeply personal poem in which H.D.’s profound emotional and mental anguish and sense of betrayal are examined through the lens of Leda’s physical rape. H.D.’s sense of fear which led her to abandon divorce proceedings and remain silent is manifested in her inability to “embody” Leda and give her corporeal form. As a lily, Leda is silent and passive, longing yet wounded.

In her 1924 volume *Heliodora*, H.D. continues subtly to explore the issue of patriarchal violence. In 1918, she had become passionately involved with Winifred Ellerman (Bryher). Until approximately 1924 the two women remained lovers, but this

relationship later shifted to a committed friendship and lifelong relationship. Several of the poems in *Heliodora* are translations of Sapphic verse, perhaps influenced by H.D.'s own experiences of a lesbian relationship with Bryher. This project is most fully explored in "Fragment Sixty-Eight," where the invocation of Sappho implies a lesbian perspective, and allows H.D. to repudiate her heterosexual relationship with Aldington by invoking a lesbian alternative. Never is this alternative made concrete, and it is unlikely that H.D. meant for this poem to be the sort of lesbian manifesto behind Rich's "Twenty-One Love Poems" (the central section of *DCL*). As with much of H.D.'s poetry, "Fragment Sixty-eight" remains masked, but the Sapphic presence beneath this mask intimates the erotic relationship that H.D. shared with Bryher. The poem directly alludes to Aldington (who brought violets to H.D. while she was hospitalized) when the speaker asks "why were those slight words / and the violets you gathered / of such worth?" (H.D. *Collected* 188). This detail helps to identify the "you" who inflicts such pain upon the speaker. It is Aldington, whose "limbs are more terrible / to do me hurt," and H.D. asks "what can death mar in me / that you have not?" (188). The poem vacillates between anger at the violence inflicted by the speaker's lover and a wish for death. The poem repeatedly invokes how the speaker "env[ies] you / your chance of death," and the "you" is again Aldington, as representative of male, heterosexual lovers (187-189). The poem creates a set of dual options: violent, tormenting love or death. These alternatives epitomize the traditional avenues available to women who must either submit to heterosexual norms of love or die alone and forsaken. The speaker is so traumatized by her lover and the "agony of love" he inspires that she wishes for death. But the Sapphic background of the poem implies that there is another option besides heterosexual

“thralldom” or death. For the speaker, heterosexual love is so innately tied to suffering, “hate,” “agony,” and “terrible...hurt” that she can no longer endure such feelings. The poem’s powerful rejection of heterosexual love and the violence that characterizes masculine lovers is a result of H.D.’s emphasis on male violence as it is manifested in personal relationships.

The early poetry of Rich and H.D. is engaged in a shared project: the exploration of the ways in which male violence is manifested in personal relationships and in the conditions of women’s lives. Both women, as they gain in political awareness and personal confidence begin to set aside their early male influences and explore new poetic directions. In 1966, Rich and her family moved to New York City where Rich and her husband became involved in Vietnam War protests. Rich published *Necessities of Life: Poems 1962-1965* in 1966, *Leaflets: Poems 1965-1968* in 1969, and *The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970* in 1971 (Gelpi and Gelpi 424). These poems marked a new level of political engagement for her, but as Craig Werner notes, many of Rich’s readers were slow to recognize the shift in her poetry. He comments that, “in the mid-1960’s her reviewers, most of them males with academic credentials, still viewed her work from the perspective established by Auden... Robert Lowell’s 1966 review of National Book Award Nominee *Necessities of Life*, despite its favorable tone, echoed Auden in the phrase ‘modesty without mumbling’” (Werner 7-8). John Ashbery (a poet of the Allen anthology) in a condescending review of *Necessities of Life* labels Rich as “a kind of Emily Dickinson of the suburbs” and argues that “a reader conversant with... Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Ed Sanders, for instance, is not likely to be shaken up” by Rich’s poetry (Ashbery 217-218).

But though unacknowledged to a great degree by critics and reviewers, Rich's poetry had shifted away from the formalism of her early years. *Necessities of Life* has none of the "detachment" that Auden praised, and instead has several poems detailing highly personal aspects of her married life and her growing involvement in political issues. In an unpublished interview, Rich described the political forces present in this work:

Actually a few of my poems do come out of what you might call 'public issues.' In my last book [*Necessities of Life*], "Spring Thunder" is about watching one's country drift deeper and deeper into war, and "Open Air Museum" has to do with a sickness in the American landscape that seems to stand for a sickness in the air itself—huge, wayside dumps, the endless burning of trash, bodies of wrecked cars piled along acres of highway. But I can't write 'napalm poems' or poems about VietNam peasants... Most of the anti-war poems are unfortunately rather like Soviet realist literature, their intentions are of the best but they have little to do with poetry. (Unpublished Interview Folder 7 Schlesinger Manuscripts)

The "napalm" and "Vietnam peasant" poems alluded to are likely Denise Levertov's "What Were They Like" and "Advent 1966." (Levertov and Rich were to become colleagues at Stanford later in their careers.) Though her next volume, *Leaflets*, presents a more overtly political anti-war agenda, Rich still refrains from direct depiction of Vietnam violence, and instead connects the violence of the war to the violence of American culture and to the violent effects of war on the human psyche.

Rich often depicts this psychic damage through dream images. In her poem, "Jerusalem," written in 1966 and published in *Leaflets*, she describes a dream in which "children / are swaddled in smoke / and their uncut hair smolders" while the poet is "picking up shells / from a half-dead war / and I wake up in tears / and hear the sirens screaming" (Rich *Leaflets* 24). Other poems, such as "Implosions" ("when it's finished

and we're lying / in a stubble of blistered flowers / eyes gaping, mouths staring / dusted with crushed arterial blues") and "Violence" ("could I have dreamed a violence / like that of finding / your burnt-out cigarettes / planted at random, charred / fuses in a blown-up field?") typify her increasing preoccupation with the violence of the Vietnam War and her desire to explore the intersections of the personal and the political.

The late 1960's were a difficult time for Rich personally. Rich separated from her husband in 1970, and he committed suicide later that year. With the publication of *The Will to Change* in 1971, Rich's political poetry shifted focus away from Vietnam and toward the burgeoning women's liberation movement. In her poem, "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," she repeatedly addresses the inadequacy of language to express female experiences. She maintains that, "this is the oppressor's language / yet I need it to talk to you" and concludes the poem with a section of prose text that reads, "the typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning, I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language" (*Collected* 366). A stark contrast to her first poems which Auden praised for not telling "fibs," Rich's poetry in *The Will to Change* confidently vocalizes the female experiences which patriarchal society has forced the poet to repress: "our whole life a translation / the permissible fibs / and now a knot of lies / eating at itself to get undone / Words bitten thru words / meanings burnt off like paint / under the blowtorch / all those dead letters / rendered into the oppressor's language" (*Collected* 385). Rich is no longer interested in "the permissible fibs," but instead intends to illuminate the corrosive "knot of lies" suppressed within her.

In 1973, Rich's status as a major feminist writer was solidified with the publication of *Diving into the Wreck*. She opens this collection with the words of George

Eliot: “there is no private life which is not determined by a wider public life” (Rich *Diving* 1). This belief undergirds much of Rich’s project in *Diving*. No longer content to describe the tensions of mother/artist or the difficulties of her married life, Rich begins a symbolic quest to determine the ways in which “wider public life” shapes her private experiences. The title poem metaphorically evokes this quest, as the speaker dons diving gear to explore the wreck of literary history. The diver searches through the ruins for the “book of myths / in which / our names do not appear” (Rich *Diving* 24). She wishes to expose the patriarchal framework she sees underwriting history, society, and the literary tradition—the “book of myths” which silences female voices and influence. In her poem, “From the Prison House,” Rich details her growing awareness of the violence perpetrated against women. She writes that, “underneath my lids another eye has opened,” and this new eye sees “the violence / embedded in silence / This eye is not for weeping / its vision / must be unblurred/ though tears are on my face / its intent is clarity / it must forget / nothing” (Rich *Diving* 17-18). Rich’s poetry, and her political activism, became intrinsically linked. Her growing awareness of the women’s liberation movement prompted increasingly radical feminist poetry.

Rich’s manuscripts in the Schlesinger Library include hundreds of her newspaper clippings from the mid-1970’s, each of which chronicles instances of violence against women. The articles, with titles like “Sex-based Discrimination in the Mental Institutionalization of Women,” “The International Crime of Genital Mutilation,” and “Women as Victims: The Fall and Rise of Psychosurgery,” reveal Rich’s concentrated commitment to international and domestic issues of women’s rights and her interest in the wider, contemporary events of the volume.

H.D.'s poetry undergoes a similar shift as she breaks free of some of the earlier male influences, like Pound, Lawrence and Aldington. Like Rich, H.D. also engaged in a project of reviving lost female voices. In her experiments with Sapphic verse, H.D. used translations with veiled lesbian undertones to express her relationship with Bryher. But in her poem, "Eurydice," H.D. tells the famous tale of Orpheus and Eurydice from the perspective of the abandoned—and very angry—female lover. Here, rather than speaking through Sappho, H.D. reclaims the character of Eurydice and allows her to tell her own story. H.D. and Rich both subvert the "oppressor's language" by reclaiming female influences of the past.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis and other scholars have linked the sense of rage that characterizes "Eurydice"—which also appears in *Heliodora*—to H.D.'s initial discovery of her husband's infidelity (DuPlessis "Romantic Thralldom" 410-11). From the first lines, "So you have swept me back, / I who could have walked with the live souls," this poem has a pointed, accusatory tone (H.D. *Collected* 51). Eurydice gains control of the story by asserting a very direct "I" in the second line, claiming that Orpheus swept back, "I who could have walked with the live souls" (51). Though the story has traditionally only been told from Orpheus' perspective, H.D. dramatically reclaims this voice for Eurydice. This reclamation of female voices—particularly those in historical, literary, or historical traditions—is analogous to Rich's project in *Diving into the Wreck*.

In the traditional myth, Orpheus looks back at Eurydice not out of "arrogance" or "ruthlessness" as H.D.'s poem insists, but out of love. However, H.D.'s Orpheus is careless and cruel, and looks back at Eurydice, damning her to return to Hades. But H.D. re-writes Eurydice's fate and thus overcomes the victimization of the early sections of the

poem. No longer is Eurydice doomed to suffer in Hades: instead, she taunts Orpheus, delighting that “my hell is no worse than yours” for “I have more fervor / than you in all the splendor of that place... I have more light” (*Collected* 54). The final section is an affirmation of Eurydice’s power to withstand the injury inflicted upon her by her lover:

At least I have the flowers of myself,
and my thoughts, no god
can take that;
I have the fervor of myself for a presence
and my own spirit for light;

and my spirit with its loss
knows this;
though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass (55).

Eurydice’s final reclamation of a sense of self parallels H.D.’s own attempts to assert her identity after the crisis of Aldington’s infidelity. Eurydice asserts that she has the “flowers of myself” and “my thoughts” which “no god” can take from her. In the late nineteenth century poems written by women were often referred to as flowers, and H.D.’s reference to the “flowers of myself” is likely invoking this traditional representation. Though Eurydice cannot have the flowers that flourish above ground, she still retains her poetry and her “thoughts,” and challenges any “god” to try to take these from her.

In her next volume, *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931), H.D. continues to re-examine literary and historical traditions. Several of the poems in this collection are H.D.’s translations of Greek choruses from *The Bacchae*, *Hecuba*, *Morpheus*, and other classical dramas. These poems, when taken in their entirety, represent an ambitious project of re-

telling stories from a woman's voice. As DuPlessis explains, "H.D.'s examination of gender in the classical world led her to construct dramatic monologues reinterpreting myth in the voices of its muted female heroes... Giving the muted female character her own story postulates that alternative observations and possibly radically different interpretations of central choices and acts can be read from a well known myth. This shift of narrative paradigm can create a critique of the assumptions and values implied in the hegemonic story" (*Career* 26). These reconstructions of Greek lyrics are early indications of H.D.'s later projects in *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* which would cement her posthumous reputation.

In 1933 H.D. underwent psychoanalysis with Freud in Vienna. Her relationship with Freud was extremely complex. His theories are predicated on the idea that female physiological and psychological attributes are defined in relation to their male counterparts. In Freud's theories, women are defined by their lack, or "otherness," when compared with the male standard. Though H.D. was a firm believer in Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, she rejected many of his gender dichotomies. In "The Master," she wrestles with the intellectual misogyny and male dominance inherent in Freud's theories. But as DuPlessis and Freidman explain, H.D. chose not to publish this poem during her lifetime: "H.D. wrote to Bryher... that she would not have her analysis with Sigmund Freud 'spoiled' by the publication of her poem 'The Master' (written 1934-1935) in her friend Robert Herring's *Life and Letters Today*. Both Bryher and Herring were insistent that she print 'The Master.' But in 1935, H.D. refused to release the poem" (417). Since H.D.'s analysis with Freud ended in 1933, it is possible that H.D.'s reason for

withholding the poem had less to do with “spoiling” her psychoanalysis, and perhaps was caused by an unwillingness to publicly reject her mentor’s teachings.

She writes in “The Master” that, “I was angry with the old man / with his talk of the man-strength” and that “I could not accept from wisdom / what love taught, / woman is perfect” (455). H.D. could not accept Freud’s “wisdom” about women’s deficiencies, for her “love” has taught that “woman is perfect.” She challenges the notion that women must define themselves in opposition to man, with the assertion that, “she needs no man, / herself / is that dart and pulse of the male, / hands, feet, thighs, / herself perfect” (456).

The poem’s speaker posits that when Freud dies, the world will look on him as a prophet, and “only I, / I will escape” the worship of “The Master” (458). H.D. credits Freud with her ability to “escape,” for “it was he himself, he who set me free / to prophesy.” His theories of psychoanalysis set her free, and helped her to formulate her own theories of women. H.D. argues that in her prophecies, “no man will be present in those mysteries, / yet all men will kneel, / no man will be potent, / important, / yet all men will feel / what it is to be a woman” (460). She reverses Freud’s theory that women must all see their “castration” in order to understand their place in relation to men: instead men will be stripped of their “potency” and “importance” and taught to “feel / what it is to be a woman.” In her prophecies, “men will see how long they have been blind, / poor men / poor man-kind / how long / how long / this thought of the man-pulse has tricked them, / has weakened them, / shall see woman, / perfect” (460).

H.D., while admitting that Freudian psychoanalysis helped her to gain insight into her unconscious, repudiates Freud’s misogynistic theories of female deficiency. To H.D., woman is “perfect” and Freud’s theories pose a threat to female power that H.D. is intent

upon challenging. Her conviction that men have been blinded by “this thought of the man-pulse” is indicative of her emphasis on societal misogyny and patriarchal oppression of women. H.D. indicts not only “men,” but “man-kind”—an address which draws attention to the ways in which “man” has directed the course of all “man-kind” and the ways in which society as a whole is implicated in women’s oppression. The final images in the poem show a hopeful resolution in which all of mankind becomes aware of the ways in which they have been complicit in patriarchal dominance. H.D. writes that, “we were together / we were one” and that together mankind worships the beauty and freedom of Rhodocleia, the “Lord become woman” (460-461). This utopian vision of societal harmony challenges the Freudian notions of masculine dominance, and the violence inherent in such dominance, and instead privileges the female, the communal, and the divine.

H.D. only approaches the direct political poetry of Rich in three of her posthumously published works—“Body and Soul,” “R.A.F.” and “May 1943.” These poems, which were written during the years of WWII, address male violence as it is manifested in outright warfare. Much like Rich’s poems concerning the Vietnam-era, H.D. focuses on the effects of war on society as a whole, rather than just on the soldiers. In “May 1943,” H.D. provides her most concrete assessment of the impact of violence and war on human society. The poem opens with a meditative sequence inspired by the Orangery at Kensington Palace. There is a sign outside the building which explains that it was damaged by “German incendiary bombs” (*Collected* 494). In much the same way that a burnt out, flowering tree amidst the wreckage of London bombings sparked sections of *Trilogy*, the sight of Kensington Palace—assaulted but resilient—sparks in

H.D. a poem which tries by force of will to end the war: “I say the war is over.../ the war is over...” (495). The poem mourns the death of Goldie, an unknown woman whose death was documented in the newspapers: “found sitting upright / at the wheel of her emergency car / dead” (498). Perhaps because H.D.’s daughter, Perdita, drove such an emergency car, or perhaps because her own daily life was controlled by the “siren wail” and “black out” of the London bombings, Goldie’s death symbolizes the intense effect that the bombings had on H.D.’s life and on her psyche (496, 499).

In “May 1943,” H.D. laments the female victim on the home front, not the male victim on the field of battle. This is a lament for Goldie (who is associated with Gretel, Goldilocks, sea nymphs, a princess, and St. Catherine) and a lament for the pervasive effects of war on the daily lives of a people who are “anaemic faces in the line / waiting for the bread queue” (498). She writes that “Goldie was one of us, / we are one with Goldie” (498). H.D.’s poem gives voice to the suffering inflicted on those left on the home front, and stands as her most powerful condemnation of the violence inherent in war. “May 1943” underscores that it is not only the soldiers who suffer injury during war; it is all of humanity that suffers.

Both Rich and H.D. followed a trajectory in which male violence was analyzed first in terms of personal lives and later in terms of broader societal and historical contexts. But their trajectories most closely intersect during the years of the mid-late 1970’s. Adrienne Rich prefaced her 1978 collection of poetry, *The Dream of a Common Language*, with a quote from the third section of H.D.’s *Trilogy* (published originally in three parts in 1944, 1945, and 1946): “I go where I love and where I am loved, / into the snow; / I go to the things I love / with no thought of duty or pity.” This resolution to “go

where I love and where I am loved” is particularly revealing, for *DCL* is Rich’s first work that openly acknowledges her lesbian love—as it is manifested romantically, sexually, and substantively. Rich’s “Twenty One Love Poems,” which form the physical and thematic center of the collection, are highly personal descriptions of how “two women who are lovers in heterosexist society live with contradictions embedded in their most intimate thoughts and feelings” (Oktenberg 334). These twenty-one poems detail Rich’s choice to “go where I love” and to openly acknowledge that this place is one inhabited by female lovers.

In the second of the “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich addresses her lover, describing “the desire to show you to everyone I love, / to move openly together / in the pull of gravity, which is not simple” (25). These words recall the lines from H.D. with which Rich prefaces *DCL*. Rich longs to “mov[e] openly” with her lover and to cast her lot with those “I love and where I am loved... with no thought of duty or pity” She tries to imagine a world in which she and her lover can exist openly, but the “pull of gravity”—the reality of patriarchal society—makes this difficult. Rich recognizes that her mission “is not simple,” but in the final line of her “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich announces that “I choose to walk here...” (36). In *DCL*, Rich has chosen to go where she loves, to break new ground, and to leave fresh footprints in H.D.’s open field of snow.

Rich has written that “about the importance of H.D.’s epic poems to me in the period when I was writing *DCL*, there is no question” (Rich “Comment” 734). Rich has also acknowledged “the ‘silent dialogue’ I was having with H.D. as I wrote” the poems in *DCL* (735). It is therefore surprising that this connection between the poetry of H.D. and Rich’s poems in *DCL* has not garnered more scholarly attention. In Claire Keyes’ *The*

Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich, H.D. is mentioned in two short asides relating generally to modernist writers. Craig Werner's *Adrienne Rich: The Poet and Her Critics* includes a vague comparison of H.D.'s *Trilogy* and Adrienne Rich's *Leaflets*, but the relationship between these poets is dealt with in a single sentence. Even in Donna Krolik Hollenberg's lengthy *H.D. and Poets After*, the relationship between Rich and H.D. is not examined for more than a few cursory paragraphs. Many discussions assert that H.D. served as a "poetic, political, and personal mothe[r]" to Rich, or that Rich "buil[t] on the tradition of such women poets as H.D., Millay, Moore, Plath and Levertov," but fail to fully address how this influence manifests itself (Werner 170; Martin 234). Much of the existing scholarship employs "catch-all" lists such as the one above, in which H.D. is cited as an influence on Rich or Rich is cited as a later devotee of H.D.

Three articles do explore in greater depth Rich's relationship with the work of H.D. The first of these, "I Go Where I Love: An Intertextual Study of H.D. and Adrienne Rich," published in 1983 by Susan Stanford Friedman is the most exhaustive, but several factors limit this article's usefulness. The first of these is simply an issue of chronology. Friedman's article is over 25 years old. Rich has continued to publish prolifically, and as Craig Werner notes, "*The Dream of a Common Language* and *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* remained subject to revision" as her poetic trajectory reinvented itself yet again in the 1980's (9). Werner argues that this changeability is one of the hallmarks of Rich's career, and that "Rich can be seen as part of a 'mainstream' tradition of twentieth-century male poetry: that of Yeats, Eliot, Williams, and Auden, each of whom has been praised for his ability to re-create his poetic voice in response to new

philosophical and/or political influences” (5) Though it is strange to think of Rich as a poet in the “‘mainstream’ tradition of twentieth-century male poetry,” her later poems, beginning with those collected in *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986) show an increasing interest in moving beyond *DCL* to explore new political realities. Rich’s poetry of the 1980’s and extending into the present is far more interested in the ways that many groups—not only women—have been marginalized for reasons of race, class, culture, language, sexual orientation, and other societal classifications. H.D.’s poetry is devoid of many of these concerns, and is consequently increasingly less important to Rich’s interests.

Secondly, directly after the publication of Friedman’s article, Rich leveled a rebuttal against many of Friedman’s assertions, citing misreadings of several of her poems. Rich argued that Friedman did not give enough attention to the political and social frameworks in which each poet worked. In her critique, she differentiates between the political culture of H.D.’s era and that of her own time. She argues that, “I was writing, as H.D. was not, out of a movement that has described and analyzed male violence politically” (“Comment” 735). Rich also argues that Friedman’s article deals closely with *Dream of a Common Language*, but fails to address her more recent work, *AWP*. She finds this failure problematic, because “to write as if it were my last, or even latest book, let alone my final word as a poet, is to encapsulate it and drastically skew its possible meanings, the very nature of its creation. Friedman does not even mention the existence of *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*—a book that is both continuous with and in some ways contradictory to *DCL*” (734). Rich is concerned that Friedman’s argument misrepresents her relationship to H.D.; while H.D. was important to Rich

during the time in which she was writing *DCL* and the subsequent *Wild Patience*, her influence was less by the time Friedman's argument was published in 1983.

The other two articles to address at length the connection between Rich and H.D. are "Two Ways of Spelling it Out: An Archetypal-Feminist Reading of H.D.'s *Trilogy* and Adrienne Rich's 'Sources'" by Albert Gelpi and "What Words Say: Three Women Poets Reading H.D." by Janet Montefiore. Gelpi's article appears in the collection *Jungian Literary Criticism*, edited by Richard Sugg, and examines the connections between H.D.'s *Trilogy* and Rich's "Sources" (a series of poems published alone in 1983, and later as the first section in the 1986 collection, *Your Native Land, Your Life*). Gelpi does not, however, engage in much in-depth *comparison* between the two works. Rather, he discusses *Trilogy* and "Sources" as archetypal examples of ways in which each poet comes to a sense of self-definition. Appropriately, given the collection's theme, Gelpi examines both works from a Jungian critical perspective, arguing that "in Jungian theory, the lifelong process of individuation requires the resolution and integration of polar aspects of the psyche" (377).

He examines the two books separately, occasionally arguing for specific similarities, but more frequently arguing for broad commonalities: "as poems of self-definition they have much in common. The crux for both is an engagement with the animus, and in both poems that engagement—more beneficent for H.D., more conflicted for Rich—issues in metamorphosis: the emergence of the self from the cocoon" (394). He argues that "what links these poets (and links them both to Emily Dickinson) is a ferocious commitment to the life of consciousness in language as the instrument for discovering and constructing their identities as women and as poets in specific historical

situations” (388). In terms of directly comparing their works, Gelpi presents them as differing in form but united in mission: “in the crucible of language, H.D. sublimates and encodes autobiography into hieroglyphic symbol; Rich concentrates pressure on autobiographical facts to the point of revelation and release. *Trilogy* enacts autogenesis in archetypal robes; *Sources* performs it in person” (394).

Gelpi’s article—though a fruitful application of Jung’s theories to the works of two major poets—engages in little direct comparison between the work of H.D. and Rich. The furthest Gelpi will assert is that “H.D. is an important poet for Adrienne Rich” (387). Instead he focuses on their shared use of literary techniques and tropes. Thus, his article is somewhat limited in its examination of the relationship of H.D. and *DCL* and the nature of H.D.’s continued presence in *AWP*.

The most recent work in which the connections between H.D. and Rich are explored is in a chapter of Janet Montefiore’s *Arguments of the Heart and Mind*. Montefiore examines the connection between H.D. and three later female poets: Denise Levertov, Adrienne Rich, and Judy Grahn. In a brief chapter, Montefiore claims that H.D. had a huge degree of influence over Rich. She writes that, “H.D. matters to Rich not only as a source of inspirational ideas but formally: her poetry has influenced the methods and texture of Rich’s own work” (Montefiore 86). She does not, however, spend much time actually making the case for H.D.’s influence. Instead, Montefiore employs broad statements such as, “conscious feminism doesn’t estrange Rich from the ‘unpolitical’ older poet. On the contrary, she has acknowledged that her feminist vision has been profoundly affected by H.D., whose strongest influence on her appears in her *Dream of a Common Language*, her most optimistically lesbian-feminist collection” (87).

Thus there has been little discussion of the strong connection—acknowledged by Rich, supported by the text, and substantiated by Rich’s writings, both published and unpublished—that exists between *Trilogy* and *DCL*. It will be beneficial therefore to contextualize Rich’s interaction with *Trilogy* to understand its importance for her at the time in which she was writing *DCL*. H.D.’s *Trilogy* was first published in one volume posthumously in 1973 and comprises three long poetic sequences which had been published individually during her lifetime—“The Walls do not Fall” (1944); “Tribute to the Angels” (1945); and “The Flowering of the Rod” (1946). This publication of *Trilogy* by New Directions marked the beginning of a “rediscovery” of H.D.’s poetry. Friedman’s article “Who Buried H.D.? A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in the ‘Literary Tradition’” was published in 1975, and helped to situate H.D.’s work in the middle of the literary feminist debate. Friedman asks why H.D.’s work had been almost entirely forgotten, and posited:

...the answer is simple enough, I think. It lies biographically and factually right in front of our critical noses—too close perhaps to be seen easily. It lies in what makes H.D. and her work different from a long string of more studied poets like Eliot, Pound, Crane, Williams, and Yeats. And it lies in the response of her critics. She was a woman, she wrote about women, and all the ever-questioning, artistic, intellectual heroes of her epic poetry and novels were women. (803)

Friedman ushered in a new reading of H.D.: the forgotten feminist whose gynocentric work has been ignored by the literary tradition.

Her article fiercely attacks existing, male-dominated criticism of H.D., particularly two articles that had appeared six years earlier in *Contemporary Literature* as part of a special issue designed to further literary interest in H.D. Friedman criticized essays by Joseph N. Riddel and Norman N. Holland, claiming that “their discussion of

her psyche as the generating source in her art, H.D.'s supposedly self-evident longing for a penis (don't all women want one?) becomes the focus for their discussion of her artistic identity and poetry" (804). Friedman questions their reliance on Freudian modes of criticism, and argues for a new critical perspective which would recognize that "what H.D. and poets like her have to say about women's experience and potential is as much a legitimate focus for a course as any thematic or chronological breakdown in a college curriculum" (814). Thus Friedman's article not only made a case for H.D.'s importance; it also made urgent claims for the importance of female literary contributions. She argues that the emerging fields of "Women's Studies—like Afro-American Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, Chicano Studies, Asian Studies, Native American Studies—has been a necessary answer to the closed curriculums of the established literary tradition" (813). Published in 1975, just as second wave feminism was cresting, Friedman's article was invested not only in the recovery of H.D.'s work, but also in the validation of the emerging field of Women's Studies.

After Friedman, feminist authors Susan Gubar and Rachel Blau DuPlessis also published articles—in 1978 and 1979 respectively—which address the feminist issues latent in H.D.'s writings, and the "recovery" of H.D. became an important part of the literary feminist movement of the late 1970's of which Rich was an active member. It was amidst this debate about H.D.'s feminism that Rich first encountered *Trilogy*. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," originally published in 1971, Rich writes that "I read the older women poets with their peculiar keenness and ambivalence: Sappho, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, Elinor Wylie, Edna Millay, H.D. I discovered that the woman poet most admired at the time (by men) was Marianne

Moore” (*LSS* 39). There is a footnote, however, marked with Rich’s initials and dating from 1978, which notes that “I knew H.D. only through anthologized lyrics; her epic poetry was not then available to me” (*LSS* 40). During the interim years between 1971 and 1978, Rich discovered H.D.’s epic poetry and found therein a poetics so wholly different from the “anthologized lyrics” she had read in her formative years, that she felt compelled to clarify her 1971 writings.

Rich has written that, “about the importance of H.D.’s epic poems to me in the period when I was writing *DCL*, there is no question—to me, and to other lesbian-feminist poets, including Judy Grahn, Marilyn Hacker, and Susan Sherman” (“Comment” 734). Additionally, Rich’s teaching notes further demonstrate that H.D.’s works were particularly important for Rich during the late 1970’s. Rich had begun teaching at Rutgers University in 1976, and in 1977 she taught a course on American Women Writers. In her unpublished notes, Rich wrote that H.D. was the “great female poetic voice of the 20th century—yet virtually unread. Dealt with as an Imagist, in terms only of her early work. Her long, late, epic poems hardly known” (Schlesinger Manuscripts Folder 397). In H.D.’s epic poems, Rich found an example of earlier poetry that was “feminist in a very deep sense: they assert the female hero, the female seer & prophet, and they affirm female sexual energy and passion even in the person of an aging woman” (Schlesinger Manuscripts Folder 397).

Not only had Rich found a literary foremother whose work was “feminist in a very deep sense,” she also found an example of poetry that embraced both politics and poetics. In her 1983 speech “Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet,” given at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Rich reflects on the importance of

canonical writers such as W.B. Yeats during her years as a student. In Yeats' poetry, she found a compelling voice that "politics leads to 'bitterness' and 'abstractness' of mind, makes women shrill and hysterical, and is finally a waste of beauty and talent" (48). Later in 1983, Rich maintained that during her years as a student, "there was absolutely nothing in the literary canon to counter [this] idea" (48). Rich asserts that H.D.'s works had been "buried by the academic literary canon," and remained unavailable to her. But in the mid-1970's, she discovered the "anti-war and woman-identified poetry" of H.D.'s epic poems (48). She had found a poet whose work linked poetry to politics without becoming "shrill and hysterical." In *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* (another of H.D.'s epic poems which began to receive attention in the mid-1970's and which Rich includes in her footnote concerning H.D.'s "epic poems"), Rich discovered the feminist critique of male violence couched in both collections.

Until the publication of *Trilogy* in 1973, Friedman's article in *College English*, and the wave of feminist interest in "recovering" H.D. and other lost female voices, H.D.'s reputation was largely that of an Imagist poet and a moderately influential participant in the modernist ex-patriate scene. But *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* solidified H.D. as an important foremother for the second-wave feminists. These poems stand as H.D.'s indictment of male violence and an enduring sign of faith in the ability of society to regenerate. During the war years, H.D. lived in London and witnessed the intense destruction of the 1940-1941 Blitzkrieg. In *Trilogy*, which H.D. referred to as her "War Trilogy" in an unpublished letter to Robert Duncan, she explores how humanity will be able to regenerate after the brutality of widespread and devastating warfare (Beinecke Manuscripts Folder 586). In the first poem of *Trilogy*, she writes, "yet the frame held: /

we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? What for?" (4). *Trilogy* is H.D.'s attempt to work through these questions and ultimately rediscover faith in the human creative ability.

This ability to "create" has dual implications. First, it refers to the powers of humans to create the mythological, religious, and literary traditions that bind people together. But for H.D., "creative" powers also are linked to the ability to procreate and create new life, which is a singularly feminine ability. To understand the present and future of humanity, H.D. explores the past, and especially the often-overlooked female past, for guidance in her regenerative efforts. Although Pound, Eliot, Williams, Crane, and other modernist poets also delved into the past in their poetry, H.D.'s particular focus on lost female voices is different. This technique anticipates many of the tenets of second wave feminism and was clearly important for Rich's *DCL* and the following collection, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*. Through the creation of a new literary tradition in which women are included and valued for their creative power, H.D. is able to offer a vision of regeneration and rebirth after the horrors of war.

H.D. plunges into the narrative traditions of the past to recover lost "words" and influences which she can employ to create this new literary tradition. She wishes to blur the dichotomous gender relationship that she believes has characterized the past literary traditions. This gender binary divided women, who have been representative of sin, weakness, and dangerous sexuality, from men, who have represented reason and temperance in the face of woman's evil. H.D. blurs the iconic figures of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary into one woman who encapsulates the female experience. Mary Magdalene, infamous for her sexual promiscuity, and the Virgin Mary,

famous for her purity and chastity even as she bears a child, fuse into one woman, erasing the traditional delineations between acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexual expression. Mary appears “with none of her usual attributes,” as simply a woman (97).

H.D. details the way in which artistically, culturally, and religiously Mary has been defined by men. By writers and religious figures, she has been assigned the appellations of “Our Lady of the Goldfinch, / Our Lady of the Candelabra, / Our Lady of the Pomegranate, / Our Lady of the Chair,” and in paintings, “we have seen her, an empress, / magnificent in pomp and grace, / ...we have seen her head bowed down / with the weight of a domed crown, / or we have seen her, a wisp of a girl / trapped in a golden halo” (93). Mary has been “seen”—and defined— “in cathedral, museum, cloister, / at the turn of the palace stair” (94). Her image has been written, painted, and promulgated by patriarchal societal, literary, and religious histories. Thus, the speaker in the poem is startled that the Lady has arrived to speak for herself. The speaker wonders “how could I imagine / the Lady herself would come” (92). The speaker notes specifically that, “the Child was not with her” (97).

H.D. highlights the tension that exists between the way Mary is traditionally portrayed by society and the events described in the poem. Poem 36 opens with “Ah (you say) this is Holy Wisdom,” and this line sets up an implicit argument between the speaker and the “you” that represents male society at large (101). This amorphous “you” asserts that “this is the new Eve who comes / clearly to return, to retrieve / what she lost the race” and “she brings the Book of Life, obviously” (101). The certainty with which these motives are attributed to Mary—“clearly,” “obviously”—illustrate the degree to which patriarchal society has controlled perceptions of Mary.

But the speaker of the poem takes issue with this portrayal. The speaker insists that Mary does not appear—as the ambiguous, inclusive “you” of male-dominated society assumes—to redeem “Eve” and “what she lost the race,” for she does not carry “the Book of Life” with prescriptions for how to reorder society (101). Instead, she “carries a book but it is not / the tome of ancient wisdom” (103). In the Lady’s book, “the pages, I imagine, are the blank pages / of the unwritten volume of the new” (103). These blank pages are a symbol of regenerative hope. H.D. asserts that, through inclusion of lost female voices in these blank pages, the literary tradition will no longer be tied to the static notions of good versus evil, man versus woman, sinner versus saint. By rejecting the “Book of Life,” the poem offers the hope that the traditional divide between violent, patriarchal oppression and submissive, feminine victimhood can be re-imagined in the “unwritten volume of the new” (103).

H.D.’s final collection of poetry, *Helen in Egypt*, was published in 1961, just before her death in September of that year. Similar to *Trilogy*, *Helen in Egypt* is concerned with the recovery of a female poetic voice in the annals of literary history. H.D.’s central aim in this epic poem is to re-tell the archetypal quest myth from the silenced female perspective, and to allow Helen—“hated of all Greece”—to uncover her own story. As Alicia Ostriker argues, “the *donné* of H.D.’s three-part *Helen in Egypt* is that Helen of Troy—our culture’s archetypal woman-as-erotic-object—was actually a male generated illusion, a ‘phantom,’ and that ‘the Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion’” (“Thieves” 79). The mythological Helen of Troy is an illusion, and H.D. helps Helen to tell her own story. The story which emerges is neither sure nor finite. Instead, it is the story of a woman whose identity has been thrust upon her by patriarchal labels

and inherited narratives, and the poem details her quest to recover her own suppressed memories of this archetypal story.

In the opening of *Pallinode* (the first section of *Helen in Egypt*), H.D. details her plan to re-envision the myth of Helen of Troy. A pallinode, or as it is often spelled, palinode, is an ode in which the author recants a previous assertion or traditional belief. In his classical Palinode, Stesichorus recants his earlier accusation that Helen was solely responsible for the fall of Troy, asserting instead that she was actually in Egypt. But this re-telling in no way accomplishes the same goal as H.D.'s attempt to redeem the maligned Helen. As Friedman helpfully clarifies, both Stesichorus and Euripedes (who also re-envisioned Helen in Egypt rather than in Troy) "established Helen's innocence by seeing her as a modest and chaste Penelope figure who waits patiently in Egypt for her husband to reclaim her" ("Creating" 377). H.D. is not interested in redeeming Helen by simply changing her from sexual sinner to chaste, passive sufferer. Instead, H.D. wants to strip away the layers of imposed identity to allow Helen to tell her own story devoid of traditional associations and expectations.

What emerges are a number of different Helens in various places, Egypt, Troy, Leuké (also known as the White Island), and Greece and various different periods of her life. She is sometimes the young Helen, engaged to Theseus, at other times the wife to Menelaus and mother to Hermione, sometimes the rebellious lover of Paris, or at others the infatuated lover of Achilles. Sometimes she is alone, deciphering the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt and trying to make sense of their coded messages. Near the end of Helen's journey, H.D. writes that, "So this third Helen, for the moment, rejects both the transcendental Helen and the intellectual or inspired Helen, for this other 'numb

with a memory” (258). Helen endeavors to “break through the legend, / the fame of Achilles, / the beauty of Helen” (259). For centuries, the story of Helen of Troy has been told by others; in *Helen in Egypt*, Helen confronts the many identities that have been thrust upon her, and finds her own voice to tell a very different story of the Helen—one in which she is not even in Troy.

Trilogy and *Helen in Egypt* were both important to Rich during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. In her article discussed above, Friedman argues that, “both *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* deeply reinforced the direction of Rich’s thought [during the period in which she was writing *DCL*] and the urgency of finding poetic expression for her feminist vision” (232). In her response to Friedman’s article, Rich confirmed the importance of both epic poems, asserting that “about the importance of H.D.’s epic poems to me during the period when I was writing *DCL*, there is no question” (Rich “Comment” 734). Friedman argued that, “in particular, *Trilogy* and *The Dream of a Common Language* are companion volumes whose echoing ideas and language establish reverberating intertextualities” (232). Rich does not oppose this assertion that *Trilogy* was of particular importance for *DCL*—and even admits this volume contains a “silent dialogue” with H.D.—but she does critique Friedman for failing to address her subsequent work, *AWP* (735). Rich asserts that *AWP* is “both continuous with and in some ways contradictory to *DCL*” (Rich “Comment” 734).

One of the ways that *AWP* is “continuous” with *DCL* is its continued interest in violence as it is manifested against women. As will be explored below, *DCL* and *AWP* represent the height of Rich’s interest in patriarchal violence. Her later works become increasingly aware of the violence caused by socio-economic, racial, cultural, and

linguistic discrimination. Thus, H.D.'s works are the most relevant for *DCL* and *AWP*; Rich valued H.D.'s work for its critique of patriarchy and male violence as she explains in the following excerpt from her 1977 essay "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman,"

In my college years we studied the "great" long poems of modernism: Eliot's "The Waste Land," Hart Crane's "The Bridge," Pound's "Cantos"; and later William Carlos Williams's "Paterson," Allen Ginsberg's "Howl." But we did not read, and courses in modern poetry still do not teach, H.D.'s epic poem "Trilogy" in which she confronted war, nationalist insanity, the ruin of the great cities, not mourning the collapse of Western civilization but turning back for her inspiration to the gynocentric tradition. H.D. insisted that the poet-as-woman should stop pouring her energies into a ground left sterile by the power-mongers and death-cultists: *Let us leave / the place-of-a-skull / to them that have made it*. Nor did we know that H.D.'s life had been literally saved by a woman, Bryher, who took her off to Greece after her near-death childbirth in the 1917 flu epidemic, and stood beside her while the poet underwent the hallucination, or vision, out of which her mature work was to flower" (*LSS* 256-7).

Rich valued H.D.'s confrontation of patriarchal violence and her return to "the gynocentric tradition." These themes are as evident in *AWP* as in *DCL*, and thus it is fruitful to examine H.D.'s presence in *AWP* as well as *DCL*. As Friedman argues, it is most appropriate to examine *Trilogy* and *DCL* as "companion volumes," but it is equally appropriate to explore the presence of *Helen in Egypt* in Rich's work.

As Friedman points out, "*Trilogy* does not explicitly link war with patriarchy. But in her profoundly antifascist epic *Helen in Egypt*—written between 1952 and 1954 partially in answer to the fascism in Pound's *Cantos*—H.D. returned to the subject of war and directly connected violence with patriarchy" (Friedman "I Go Where" 232). Thus, *Helen in Egypt* is more similar

to *AWP* than to *DCL*. *AWP* is more directly critical of male violence as it is manifested in terms of the material realities of women's lives. In *DCL*, Rich critiques the violence of an exclusionary, male-dominated language, but in *AWP* she draws attention to the physical violence perpetrated against women. In *AWP*, Rich describes how "in silence he twists the flesh of her thigh / with his nails in silence that her tears begin to flow" (47). This "silent," physical violence of *AWP* is not the same type of violence explored in *DCL*, and is more appropriately explored in conjunction with *Helen in Egypt*—H.D.'s more explicitly anti-war work. Thus, as Friedman proposed, *Trilogy* and *DCL* will be examined as "companion volumes" but *Helen in Egypt* and *AWP* will also be explored together to suggest H.D.'s continued presence in this later volume.

As indicated by the title, *DCL* is concerned with "the drive / to connect. The dream of a common language" (*DCL* 7). Rich writes that the "true nature of poetry" can be found in this drive to communicate and connect through a common language. Considering this interest in the communal, it is surprising that *DCL* is frequently referred to as Rich's seminal "lesbian-separatist" work. Craig Werner argues that *DCL* and *AWP* "reflected Rich's public advocacy of a lesbian separatist position" (Werner 9). And Claire Keyes and Joanne Fiet Diehl make similar claims that the Twenty-One Love Poems "plus the overt feminism of the book as a whole heighten the 'exclusion' of men, even if that is not the point, and raise the question of the 'commonality' of a language restricted to one sex" and that "what [Rich] wishes to discover is a language that, while freeing itself from the exclusionary dominance of patriarchy, establishes a new, antithetical commonality of readers, a language spoken by and for other women" (Keyes

160; Diehl 92). These critics have difficulty reconciling the idea of “commonality” that is inherent in *DCL* with Rich’s radically feminist politics.

It is likely that these critics are conflating Rich’s lifestyle during the late 1970’s (her passionate involvement in women’s rights and gay rights advocacy groups and her insistence on all female audiences for her poetry readings) with her poetic project in *DCL*. But lesbian separatism is a political term meant to express political and social realities and is not meant to demarcate literary style. In her 2001 article “Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory,” Kathy Rudy explains that the term ‘lesbian separatism’ is used to describe “political experiences” (192). To illustrate the theory of lesbian separatism, Rudy details her years living in a lesbian separatist community in North Carolina. She describes how these communities, which consisted only of women, formed to resist patriarchal social frameworks. As an ardent feminist, Rich would have been aware of this movement, and may have even espoused such a political ideal, but there is no evidence that she intended for *DCL* to promulgate a separatist position.

To use “lesbian-separatist” to describe *DCL* is therefore terminologically incorrect. *DCL* was not published by a solely female contingent; rather, it was published by Norton, a commercial—although cooperative—publishing house, and *DCL* was equally accessible to both sexes. The production and distribution of *DCL* were in no way engaged in a separatist project. It would also be incorrect to characterize the subject matter of *DCL* as “lesbian-separatist.” In her response to Friedman’s article discussing *DCL*, Rich balks at Friedman’s assertion that *DCL* advocated for “the rejection of all men forever simply on biological grounds” and instead claims that “poems of mine do

extend—from a strongly lesbian core—a ‘silent invitation’ to men to participate in transformative action; and there are men who hear it” (“Comment” 735-736). Although the poems of *DCL* are certainly of a lesbian-feminist nature, they are not separatist in the sense that they advocate for a solely female world.

In her poem, “Natural Resources,” which appears in *DCL*, Rich includes the following imagined dialogue between herself and an interviewer:

Could you imagine a world of women only,
the interviewer asked. *Can you imagine*

a world where women are absent. (He believed
he was joking.) Yet I have to imagine

at one and the same moment, both. Because
I live in both. *Can you imagine,*

the interviewer asked, *a world of men?*
(He thought he was joking.) *If so, then,*

a world where men are absent?
Absently, wearily, I answered: Yes. (61)

The interviewer asks Rich to imagine a world of only women and then a world in which they are absent and then a world of men and a world in which men are absent. Rich is drawing attention to the futility of such endeavors: Rich knows that contemplating gender in isolation is useless. She imagines both ends of the spectrum (no women and all women) happening concurrently, because “I live in both” of these situations. She lives in a world which often negates women’s influence, but also values some of their qualities. But this world of binaries in which there are either no men or no women is clearly not the answer. The weariness of Rich’s answer to the interviewer signals a sense of resignation. Separatism is not the answer, but the solution to our divided language and history remains elusive.

If *DCL* were a work informed by theories of lesbian-separatism, the usefulness of *Trilogy* to such a project would be appreciably less. While H.D. resurrects and re-envisions lost female voices, she situates them within the existing social framework and does not advance the idea of a solely female community. Instead, she imagines the possibility of unified social and literary regeneration and rebirth. H.D. offers the vision of the “unwritten volume of the new” in which the blank pages will be filled with a new story that is not predicated on the Adam-Eve binary, but will instead be inclusive and unitary (103). The final image of *Trilogy* is one of unity between Mary Magdalene and Kaspar, as Mary holds the flowering myrrh—a symbol of the possibility of new growth.

This is similar to Rich’s project with *DCL*. She is not advocating the formation of small, single-gender communities. Instead the collection is ultimately concerned with exposing the inadequacies of existing language and imagining what happens when “the rules break like a thermometer, / quicksilver spills across the charted systems, / we’re out in a country that has no language / no laws... / whatever we do together is pure invention” (*DCL* 31). Rich closely scrutinizes the ways in which language and literary history have forcibly excluded female influences: she argues that when opening a book, “you have to face / the underside of everything you’ve loved— / the rack and pincers held in readiness, the gag / even the best voices have had to mumble through” (27). But rather than advocating a coherent, political “lesbian-separatist” vision to replace the divisive, existing language, Rich instead offers “dreams” of a common language which men and women could share. It would be easier to simply dissociate and imagine a world of only women—or even only lesbians. But for Rich, such an endeavor has only limited

applicability. Rich instead tackles the difficult task of imagining how language must change—in the real world—to be truly inclusive for women.

Thus Rich's project in *DCL* is two-fold: first, to expose the inadequacies of language and the ways in which existing language perpetuates patriarchal violence against women, and second to imagine, to "dream" of a common language and to envision how such a language might be able to erase the inherited baggage of a patriarchal language. Rich wants her poems to shed light on the numerous ways in which language serves to perpetuate a toxic divide between men and women. Her many depictions of how "a conversation begins / with a lie. And each / speaker of the so-called common language feels / the ice-floe split, the drift apart" illustrate the degree to which language serves as a barrier between women and their full participation in society (16). Thus arises a second link between *Trilogy* and *DCL*: not only are both works attempting to forge a new, shared language, but both works are responding directly to the violence they see as inherent in patriarchal society. As noted earlier, H.D.'s *Trilogy* was sparked by her experiences in WWII, and in personal writings she would refer to the three sections that comprise *Trilogy* as her "War Trilogy" (Beinecke Manuscripts Folder 586). Rich is interested in the numerous ways male violence is manifested outside the traditional concept of physical, military violence. As Rich herself has commented, "I was writing, as H.D. was not, out of a movement that has described and analyzed male violence politically, not only as it expresses itself in war, but also as it is manifested in the bed, the workplace, mental institutions, the international traffic in women, media imagery, sexual surgery, and elsewhere" ("Comment" 735). Though these issues are not

concretely addressed in *DCL*, they form a background for Rich's more sustained discussion of male violence as it is manifested in, and perpetuated, by language.

DCL addresses the way that literary marginalization and exclusion is also a form of violence from which many women have suffered. For Rich, such exclusion has tangible consequences. In an unpublished interview, she discusses this concept:

To be living, trying to think and breath and conceive of yourself and create yourself in the patriarchy is constantly to be feeling how you are negated, how a total silence cloaks your entire history, how powerless women are and have been. And also to feel the degree of male hostility toward women; it's really hard for women to cope with that. [The psychoanalyst] Karen [Horney] has a very interesting essay called "The Dread of Women" in which she talks about this male dread and hatred of women, and she says it's really amazing that this has received so little mention. And what's more amazing is that women don't realize it themselves. But when you start to experience it, you experience it as violence.

(Schlesinger Manuscripts Folder 7)

Rich looked to the poetry of H.D.'s *Trilogy* as an example of an earlier poet who was cognizant of the violence inherent in patriarchy and who, without succumbing to victimhood, was able to conceive of language as a means to regenerate and recreate society.

A major intersection between H.D.'s *Trilogy* and Rich's *DCL* can be found in this resistance to victimhood, in what Rich refers to as "survival poetry." In her unpublished teaching notes from her 1977 course at Rutgers, "American Women Poets," Rich wrote the following about H.D.'s "survival poetry:"

1 of 1st things we note in reading *Trilogy* & other epic poems of H.D. is repeatedly the positive image of female heroes who struggle > societal obstacles & suffer without succumbing to despair, suicide or self-hatred. In this she is precursor of the most recent poetry by ♀ which I call "the poetry of survival". H.D.'s life—her ardent, creative old age against the well-publicized suicide of Woolf, Plath, Sexton, the suicidal heroines of

Chopin, E. Wharton, Doris Lessings visions of holocaust— (Schlesinger Manuscripts Folder 397)

In *Trilogy*, H.D. reclaims the stories of past female religious and mythical characters. H.D. calls for the reader to “search the old highways / for the true-rune, the right spell, / recover old values” (5). These values are those of “Isis, Aset or Astarte,” goddesses of the Egyptian and Babylonian traditions (5). In modern times, these women are disparaged as “harlots,” but H.D. argues that their ancient wisdom should be heeded rather than simply dismissed with other discredited narratives (5). Isis is particularly instructive for the modern age, for she sewed her husband back together after he was slashed to pieces. In a time when fragmented stories and narrative seem to call for an elusive sense of unity, Isis’ ability to bring wholeness is very relevant. Though men had succeeded in silencing these voices, H.D. argues that their ancient wisdom can help to reorder the devastated society of the postwar years.

Later in the volume, H.D. re-envision the figure of Venus, insisting that humanity “venerate” Venus, rather than casting her aside as “venereous, lascivious” (74-75). Venus, a symbol of sexuality, is also a figure of rebirth and beginning. After Cronus castrated his father Uranus, Venus was born from the sea foam where Uranus’ testicles were thrown into the sea. Venus is a symbol of new life being created from the sterile bed of male power. As Rich has commented, “H.D. insisted that the poet-as-woman should stop pouring her energies into a ground left sterile by the power-mongers and death-cultists: *Let us leave / the place-of-a-skull / to them that have made it.*” (Rich *LSS* 256). Venus’ birth from the sea connects her to the cycle of life and procreation, and this imagery is continued into the subsequent poem. H.D. writes of “a pulse uncooled that beats yet / ... it lives, it breathes” (76). H.D. emphasizes the interconnectedness of

sexuality, birth, and regeneration. She implicitly asks how a society that silences women—the ultimate force of procreation and birth—can ever hope to regenerate after the devastation of war, which has resulted in the sterility of male creative powers. Women, who are wholly tied to the notion of birth, will have a vital role to play in H.D.'s vision of a reborn social and literary culture.

This theme is continued as H.D. focuses her attention more fully upon the women of the Christian tradition. As detailed more thoroughly above, H.D.'s "Lady" combines the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, thereby erasing the traditional binary-like divide between saint and sinner. H.D. delves into the past "before Adam," and "before Eve..." and re-writes the traditional myth of Eve's fall from grace. Kaspar receives the following epiphany: "*Lilith born before Eve / and one born before Lilith / and Eve ; we three are forgiven*" (157). These three women—Lilith, Eve, and the "one born before Lilith"—are cleansed of responsibility for the original sin. Instead, these women form a line of foremothers, culminating in the appearance of the "Lady. The final image of Mary is of a "shy and simple and young" girl carrying a flowering "bundle of myrrh" (172). This Mary, who brings with her "a most beautiful fragrance, / as of all flowering things together" is symbol of regenerative hope. She has bequeathed the "unwritten volume of the new," and now carries flowering myrrh, symbolizing the potential for growth and renewal (103). New traditions and stories will have to be written to replace the old stories in which sinner-saint binaries silenced women. Through inclusion of lost female voices, the literary tradition will no longer be tied to the static notions of good versus evil, man versus woman, sinner versus saint. Instead, there will be space for new beginnings, stories, and chances for societal rebirth.

As Rich notes, H.D.'s "positive image of female heroes" who do not "succumb to despair, suicide or self-hatred" is a rarity when compared with many of Rich's other literary foremothers and contemporaries. The ability of patriarchal society to induce "despair, suicide or self-hatred" in female writers is addressed frequently in *DCL*, and it is likely that H.D.'s "survival poetry," as Rich refers to it, is clearly important to the later poet. In the first poem of the collection, Rich recalls Marie Curie and writes that "she died a famous woman denying / her wounds / denying / her wounds came from the same source as her power" (3). Marie Curie, and the second poem's heroine, mountain climber Elvira Shatayev, both died as a result of their passion: Curie died from radiation and Shatayev was buried along with her all-female expedition. Rich situates these two poems at the beginning to show the legacy of powerful women who have been overcome by societal obstacles. Rich does not mean to accuse these women of a failure to survive. They are examples of the difficulties faced by women in a hostile society. And a later poem from *DCL*, "To a Poet," reminds the reader that it is not only powerful women who succumb to the institution of patriarchal society. "*I have fears that you will cease to be / before your pen has glean'd your teeming brain / for you are not a suicide / but no one calls this murder / Small mouths, needy, suck you: This is love*" (15).

Rich is very aware of the power of patriarchal social roles to literally suck the life from women, but the poems of *DCL* ultimately affirm her desire to expose and avoid the potentiality for victimhood and defeatism that is inherent in patriarchal violence. In one of the Twenty-One Love Poems, Rich concludes, "well that's finished. The woman who cherished / her suffering is dead. I am her descendant. / I love the scar-tissue she handed on to me, / but I want to go on from here with you / fighting the temptation to make a

career of pain” (29). In “Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev,” Rich had asked “*what does it mean ‘to survive’*” (6). Throughout *DCL*, she offers a somewhat nuanced answer: to survive patriarchal society as a woman is a very troubled undertaking, but it is one which women must pursue. They must “fight the temptation to make a career of pain,” and instead strive to break through the traditional bounds of male-dominated society.

Trilogy provided Rich with an example of the importance of language as a means of survival, and showed the ways in which H.D. created a myth of regeneration and rebirth that resisted many of the existing religious and mythical frameworks. Early in *Trilogy*, H.D. introduces the importance of language and the literary tradition. She writes, “but we fight for life / we fight, they say, for breath, / so what good are your scribblings?” (17). For a generation who have endured the horrors of war, a connection to broader human literary traditions, myths, and religion has been broken. They struggle to see how “scribblings” can help them in a world for which each “breath” must be fought. But H.D. argues quite vehemently to “remember, O Sword / you are the younger brother, the latter born... *in the beginning / was the Word*” (17). This Sword image illustrates how literary traditions provide an essential “frame” upon which we can fall back. People are bound together by common mythology, religion, and literary traditions, even in the face of “Swords” which try to split them apart. This juxtaposition of the pen and the sword reinforces the pen’s creative powers and the sword’s destructive powers, while also alluding to the “Word” as the ultimate foundation that underlies society. By invoking one of the ultimate creation myths (that of the Judeo-Christian beginning of the world), H.D. reminds her reader that through “Words” humanity will be able to recreate itself.

Rich would be unlikely to draw on the Judeo-Christian underpinnings of H.D.'s argument (Rich was born to Jewish parents and retained interest in Jewish culture, but was not spiritually religious), but the sentiment that language can be used to fight against violent realities is very present in *DCL*. The forging of a new language is a new and dangerous process. As Rich writes, “no one who survives to speak new language, has avoided this: / the cutting-away of an old force that held her / rooted to an old ground / the pitch of utter loneliness / where she herself and all creation / seem equally dispersed” (75). In a poem from *DCL*, “Hunger,” Rich demonstrates that language is one of the most important tools for women who wish to resist male violence. She writes that, “they can rule the world while they can persuade us / our pain belongs in some order” (12). While men continue to hold the power of language, the power “to persuade,” they will continue to rule the world. Rich asks if this violent world will care “if a black lesbian dies / if a white prostitute dies, if a woman genius / starves herself to feed others” (12). In a world in which language is used to perpetuate violence, no one will care about the deaths of these women. But Rich emphasizes that, “I’m alive to write these words” and that women have power to resist this control (13). She ends the poem with the reminder that “until we find each other, we are alone” (14). Until voices are raised in unison against male violence, it will continue to be perpetuated. Rich insists that “these words”— language— is necessary to combat the violence in society.

Rich’s next volume, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, published in 1981, moves beyond the issue of language which is so central to *DCL*. Instead, it opens with a scene of physical violence: “out in the dark / a howl, police sirens, emergency / our 3 a.m. familiar, ripping the sheath of sleep / registering pure force as if all transpired... /

two women sleeping / together have more than their sleep to defend” (3). In this initial poem, “Images,” Rich questions “...when did we ever choose / to see our bodies strung / in bondage and crucifixion across the exhausted air / when did we choose to be lynched on the queasy electric signs / of midtown when did we choose to become the masturbator’s fix / emblem of rape in Riverside Park” (3-4). She asserts that an exclusionary language and literary canon are no longer the only source of male violence that her poetry will scrutinize: instead she argues that, “this is the war of the images” (5). The poems in *AWP*, though many resurrect past female influences, directly challenge the physical violence inflicted on women by a patriarchal society in ways that *DCL* does not. *AWP* is, as Rich tells Friedman, “continuous with, and in some ways contradictory to *DCL*” (“Comment” 734).

One of these points of continuation is the sustained importance of H.D.’s epic poetry. Just as Helen attempts throughout *Helen in Egypt* to define herself amidst the many characterizations and labels assigned to her by a male-dominated literary tradition, the poet in *AWP* attempts self-definition among the “queasy electric signs,” the images of “bondage,” and the image of “rape in Riverside Park.” In a world where women are “natural prey for pornographers,” there is violence being perpetrated against their bodies and their sense of self (28). H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* helps to unlock Rich’s poetic project in *AWP*: to examine the forces that shape female identification and reveal the ways in which patriarchal society has constructed an image of idealized womanhood.

As detailed earlier, *Helen in Egypt* re-envisioned the iconic Helen of Troy, and gives voice to the often silent figure of Helen. H.D. uses the tools of psychoanalysis to delve into Helen’s psyche—peeling back the layers of inherited narrative that have been

thrust upon her, creating the familiar image of Helen of Troy. Throughout *Helen in Egypt* is the urgent desire to closely examine inherited knowledge and the source from which it comes. H.D.'s speaker draws attention to this program of re-envisioning, arguing that "I reflect, I re-act, I re-live" (196). She questions whether "you would re-live an old story?" and illustrates the many layers of inherited stories, societal values, and accepted norms which must be stripped away to find the true Helen (223). H.D. concludes that, "Helen remembers her part in the greatest drama of Greece and of all time. She seems almost to speak by rote, she has grown into her part. But she breaks off, as it were, from the recorded drama to remind us of the unrecorded..." (234). This suppressed, unrecorded story is H.D.'s answer to the archetypal story of Helen of Troy.

Helen is shown to be multi-faceted: she is not the silent Greek beauty of mythological lore. Instead, as she struggles to establish her identity, she must examine the numerous incarnations of Helen: "this third Helen, for the moment, rejects both the transcendental Helen and the intellectual or inspired Helen for this other, 'numb with a memory'" (258). This prose section, similar to the one above, helps to "summarize" Helen's complex psychoanalytic process which is enacted in the poetic sequences. And as Helen reinvents herself, she similarly reinvents the entire narrative of the Trojan War.

This most archetypal of wars was deemed by Helen as follows:

So it was nothing, nothing at all
the loss, the gain; it was nothing,
the victory, the shouting

and Hector slain; it was nothing,
and the days of waiting were over;
perhaps his death was bitter,

I do not know; I am awake,
I see things clearly; it is dawn,

the light has changed only a little... (255).

Helen in Egypt shifts the focus away from the war, which is dubbed “nothing at all” and onto the mental processes that Helen undergoes as she searches for her identity. In this way, H.D. allows Helen to re-write history. Helen—the iconic symbol of the Trojan War—denies the importance of the war, and even denies her affiliation with Troy. In this way, she is able to create her own story outside the narratives which have been foisted upon her for centuries.

In *AWP*, Rich engages in a similar project. In her poem “Integrity,” Rich begins with an imposed definition from Webster’s dictionary, which defines “integrity” as, “the quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety” (8). Rich contrasts this idea of wholeness with her “selves” which exist not as “polarities” but as “angels.” Although the dictionary—the quintessential defining force—creates unity and order, Rich acknowledges that her multiple selves “breathe in me / as angels” (9). Like Helen, Rich must recognize “after so long, this answer / as if I had always known” that she contains within her multiple selves, or “angels” (8-9).

Helen has to examine her many selves in order to break the iconic image of the face that launched one thousand ships. Rich is engaged in a similar exploration of the power of images. In *AWP*, she argues that it is not simply language that must change, but the global portrayal of female images. In her opening poem, “The Images,” Rich asserts that, “I can never romanticize language again / never deny its power for disguise and mystification” (4). Rich has come to realize that it is not only language that must change: it is the entire structure of symbol/symbolized that is troubled. She writes that, “it was

not enough to name ourselves anew / while the spirit of the masters / calls the freedwoman to forget the slaves / *with whom do you believe your lot is cast?*” (40-41).

Rich connects the idea of male violence to this proliferation of images. Women’s bodies have become the victims of “bondage” and pornography (3). There is a politics to Rich’s new exploration of imagery: she examines the iconic Ethel Rosenberg who has become “a natural prey for pornographers / her death itself a scene / her body sizzling half-strapped whipped like a sail / she becomes the extremest victim” (28). Rich tries to do for Ethel Rosenberg what H.D. did for Helen: to re-imagine the inherited story. Rich asks, “Ethel Greenglass Rosenberg would you / have marched to take back the night / collected signatures for battered women who kill” (29). She tries to re-cast her as an empowered political activist, but concedes that, “if I dare imagine her surviving / I must be fair to what she must have lived through / I must allow her to be at last / political in her ways not in mine / ... defining revolution as she defines it” (30). She re-envision a female figure, but is ambivalent in terms of tying her to one notion of self. Perhaps Rosenberg would march with the second wave feminists, but perhaps she would “define revolution” differently from Rich.

Rich’s emphasis on the political is continued throughout *AWP*. In her poem, “Rift,” Rich describes a quarrel in which she defends the connection between politics and poetry. She writes that, “*politics / you’d say, is an unworthy name / for what we’re after. / What we’re after / is not that clear to me, if politics is an unworthy name*” (49). The “war of the images” that Rich describes in her first poem of the collection initiates a new era of politicization in her work. In “Coast to Coast,” Rich addresses the political issue of domestic violence—“if you can read and understand this poem / send something back:

a burning strand of hair / a still-warm, still-liquid drop of blood / a shell / thickened from being battered year on year” (7). In “Frame,” she explores the issues of racial violence. She describes the beating of a black woman by a white police officer, and claims that “what I am telling you / is told by a white woman who they will say / was never there. I say I am there” (48). Rich details the political violence manifested against women—a violence similar to that of the captured Helen.

After the period in which Rich wrote *AWP*, the intersections of H.D.’s works with those of Rich becomes less. Even the later poems of *AWP* begin to move away from H.D.’s concerns. The final section of *AWP* takes up the co-opting of Native American culture by the dominant white culture, including a poem in which she demonstrates the ways that women can be complicit in this dominance. Although thematic similarities to *Helen in Egypt* are still arguably present—particularly in the evocation of iconic female symbols such as, “the desert witch, the shamaness / forget the archetypes, forget the dark / and lithic profile, do not scan the clouds, massed on the horizon, violet and green, / for her icon”—Rich’s themes move away from issues of gender binaries and into a new cultural consciousness (56). Rich’s works became far more interested in the plight of the socio-economically, culturally, linguistically, and racially marginalized groups.

Rich’s next collection of poems, *Your Native Land, Your Life*, was published in 1986. By this time, Rich had begun to move away from her former practice of recalling, interrogating, praising, and conversing with female influences from the past. *DCL* and *AWP* engage in a literary dialogue with her partner and lover, female political figures of the past, female family members (mother, step-mother, grandmothers, sister), female writers both living and dead, friends, and women who have been forgotten by a society

controlled by men. *Your Native Land* does have several similar examples of such dialogue. “Emily Carr” is a conversation with Carr, a Canadian photographer who captured Native American totem poles on film, and “Education of a Novelist” is a sharp indictment of racial biases in which Rich uses passages from Ellen Glasgow’s autobiography to unearth the shadow presence behind Glasgow. This presence was her black nursemaid, about whose influence Glasgow seems unaware and unappreciative. Rich also dedicates several works to other women (“Sources” is dedicated to Helen Smelser and “Blue Rock” to Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz) and includes quotations from Georgina Herrera and Nancy Morejon.

But in addition to these quotations from women, she also includes lines from Elie Wiesel, Robinson Jeffers, and the Biblical chapter *Leviticus*. Her most poignant and direct discussions are reserved for her dead father and husband. *Your Native Land* puts the ideas which Rich formulated in *DCL* and *AWP* into action: she uses direct language to confront important male figures in her life. She does not include men in this work because of any notions of fairness or inclusiveness. Rather, she sees that the nature of patriarchy is so pervasive and so poisonous that it must be contended with. Rich must directly face the culture which wishes to silence her. Though she may wish to remain ensconced in the safe world of female connectedness, she is unable to simply sit back in the face of the racism, cultural elitism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and sexism—all of which she sees as symptomatic of the dominant culture of white, male Christians. In poem XIV of “Sources,” Rich writes “I can’t stop seeing like this / more and more I see like this everywhere” (16). She acknowledges her own shift in vision: she cannot stop seeing the numerous ways in which people can be silenced by dominant cultural

norms. H.D.'s epic poems, which include no discussion of racial, cultural, or socio-economic discrimination, are some distance from Rich's new poetic direction.

The early lives and work of H.D. and Adrienne Rich contain suggestive similarities. These parallel courses continue, culminating in the important presence of H.D.'s *Trilogy* in Rich's *DCL* and the echoes of *Helen in Egypt* in *AWP*. Rich has acknowledged the importance of H.D.'s writings to her at this time as a model for combating the violence that Rich saw as inherent in male dominated society. She drew on H.D.'s use of "survival poetry," her re-casting of lost female influences, and her ideas about the importance of language and imagery as tools for re-envisioning society. The connection between Rich and H.D. was strongest in the late 1970's and early 1980's when Rich was most concerned with articulating the toxic nature of patriarchy and with language and imagery as a means to reconstruct the patriarchal system. But as Rich's concerns began to change, the parallels between Rich and H.D.'s works became less pronounced. Though she may still look to the writings of her literary foremother, Rich has moved away from the solely feminist poetics of the late 1970's to pursue a new poetic project which illuminates numerous forms of inequity in modern society. In her most recent volume, *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* (2007), Rich continues to explore emerging political issues. For example, the following poem illustrates Rich's interest in exploring the intersections of economic disparity, Third World inequalities, and sexual exploitation:

Silent limousines meet jets descending over the Rockies.
Steam rooms, pure thick towels, vases of tuberose and jas-
mine, old vintages await the après-skiers.

Rooms of mahogany and leather, conversations open in
international code. Thighs and buttocks to open later by

arrangement.

Out of sight, out of mind, she solitary wrestles a huge
duvet, resheathes heavy tasseled bolsters. Bed after bed.
Nights, in her room, ices strained arms. Rests her legs.

Elsewhere, in Andhra Pradesh, another farmer swallows
pesticide. (Rich, *Telephone* 92)

Rich's poetry retains an interest in the solitary woman who nightly "ices strained arms," but sees her as only one part of a global-scale system of inequality. In her 1983 article, Friedman argued that Rich's approach to the female literary tradition operates on a family model of influence in which mothers and daughters seek to transcend the divisive attitudes of patriarchy ("I Go Where" 229). H.D. was one such literary foremother—particularly important to the later poet during the late 1970's and early 1980's—but Rich's continued interest in poetry that expresses a range of global issues has led her to find new poetic foremothers and forefathers apart from H.D.

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