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Yazarlar: Emel Zorluoğlu Akbey \*

REPAIRING THE M(OTHER) AND THE SELF THROUGH THE CREATION OF ART: READING  
HILDA DOOLITTLE'S HERMIONE IN PARALLEL WITH RAVEL'S L'ENFANT ET LES  
SORTILÈGES THROUGH KLEINIAN LENSES

**Abstract:** Hilda Doolittle, known as H.D., began to write prose fiction to surmount her traumas and see the way ahead again. H.D. composed varied autobiographical prose, among which her Madrigal Cycle Novels; *Asphodel* (1921-1922), *Paint it Today* (1921), *HERmione* (1927), and *Bid me To live* (1947) hold a pivotal place. Within the scope of this article, I will analyse *HERmione* in conjunction with Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* which became the main subject of Melanie Klein's paper on 'infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse'. Reading these two writings in tandem will help to clarify the connections that I draw between Klein's 'reparation' concept and H.D.'s writing. The paper, read before the British Psychoanalytic Society in 1929, both elaborates upon Klein's analysis regarding art production and introduces the term 'reparation' for the first time. Klein starts her analysis with Ravel's opera, which focuses merely on the destructive fantasies of a six-year-old boy. Throughout the paper, Klein emphasises the significance of the reparation process in the handling of destructive fantasies and reads it within the good and bad mother dichotomy. Reading these two works together will shed insight into how the reparation process helped H.D. in the handling of similar destructive fantasies and turning them into this particular prose. H.D.'s *HERmione*, though mostly read as a novel of pre-Oedipal mother by the eminent H.D. scholars, this article will further suggest that H.D. needed to return to the pre-Oedipal mother and use écriture feminine strategies not only to create a feminist writing strategy, but also to repair the good mother image that she previously destroyed because of her aggressive instincts, both in *Asphodel* and *Paint it Today*. *HERmione*, though composed seven years after *Asphodel*, is a prelude to *Asphodel* and tells the story of H.D.'s years in Pennsylvania. This altered chronology indicates that there are emotional reasons for H.D. writing out of chronological order. There may be both editorial and psychoanalytical explanations for her choice to write about her adolescent years, 1906–1911, in particular, after writing on her war trauma and stillbirth, which happened around 1915. In this article, I endeavour not only to explain such explicit choices for a deconstructed chronologic linearity, a prominent feature of modernist forms, within a Kleinian psychoanalytic framework but also to analyse how the writing process contributed to H.D.'s own 'reparation' process.

**Key Words:** Hilda Doolittle, Melanie Klein, Ravel, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, Kleinian psychoanalysis, Trauma, Reparation.

SANAT İLE ANNEYİ VE BENLİĞİ ONARMAK: HILDA DOOLITTLE'İN HERMİONE İSİMLİ  
ROMANIYLA RAVEL'İN L'ENFANT ET LES SORTİLÈGES ADLI OPERASININ KLEİNCİ BİR  
BAKIŞ AÇISIYLA OKUNMASI

**Özet:** Daha çok H.D. olarak tanınan Hilda Doolittle, yaşadığı travmaların üstesinden gelebilmek ve önünü yeniden görebilmek için otobiyografik romanlar yazmaya başlamıştır. H.D. Madrigal Döngü adı verdiği: *Asphodel* (1921-1922), *Paint it Today* (1921), *HERmione* (1927) ve *Bid Me to live* (1947) romanlarında sürekli olarak yaşadığı travmaları konu etmiştir. Bu makale kapsamında H.D.'nin *HERmione* isimli otobiyografik romanıyla Ravel'in *L'Enfant et les*

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Sortilèges operasını konu alan Melanie Klein'in ' bir sanat eserinde ve yaratıcı dürtüde yansıtılan çocukluk anksiyetesi-durumları ' başlıklı makalesi birlikte okunarak, Klein'in 'onarım' kavramı ile H.D.'nin yazıları arasındaki bağlantılar tahlil edilmeye çalışılacaktır. Klein'in 1929'da İngiliz Psikanaliz Derneği'nde sunduğu bu makalesi, hem Klein'in sanat üretimine ilişkin analizini detaylandırmakta hem de ilk kez 'onarım' terimini okuyucuya tanıtmaktadır. Klein, analizinde yalnızca altı yaşındaki bir çocuğun yıkıcı fantezilerine odaklanan Ravel'in operasını psikanalitik bir analizini kötü ve iyi anne ikilemi çerçevesinde okumuş ve bu durumdan kurtulmada 'onarım' sürecinin önemini vurgulamıştır. Bu iki eser paralel bir şekilde okunduğunda operada olduğu gibi H.D.'nin de hissettiği benzer yıkıcı fantezileri bir sanat serine dönüştürebilmesinde onarım sürecinin ne kadar önemli olduğu görülmektedir. HERmione, şuana kadar yapılan çalışmalarda her ne kadar preoedipal annenin kitabı olarak yorumlansada bu çalışma H.D.'nin preoedipal anneye dönme ve écriture feminine stratejilerini kullanmayı tercih etmesininin sebebini feminist yazım stratejisi yaratmanın ötesinde Asphodel ve Paint it Today kitaplarında yıpratığı iyi anne imajını tekrardan oluşturma ihtiyacını karşılamak için olduğu savını öne sürmektedir. H.D. yazılarında kronolojiyi alt üst etmesinin yani ilk olarak 1915 civarında yaşadığı savaş ve ölü doğum travmalarını kaleme aldıktan sonra 1906–1911 yılları hakkında yazmayı seçmesinin hem editoryal hem de psikanalitik analizleri Kleinci bir psikanalitik çerçeve içinde tartışılacak ve bu seçimin H.D.'nin kendi benliğindeki 'onarım' sürecine katkıları analiz edilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hilda Doolittle, Melanie Klein, Ravel, L'Enfant et les Sortilèges, Kleinci psikanaliz, Travma, Onarım Süreci.

## Introduction

Hilda Doolittle, known as H.D., began to write prose fiction to surmount her traumas and see the way ahead again. H.D. composed varied autobiographical prose, among which her *Madrigal Cycle Novels; Asphodel, HERmione, Paint it Today, and Bid me To live* hold a pivotal place. Within the scope of this article, I will analyse *HERmione* in conjunction with Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* which became the main subject of Melanie Klein's paper on 'infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse'. Reading these two writings in tandem will help to clarify the connections that I draw between Klein's 'reparation' concept and H.D.'s writing, as well as shedding insight into how- and why- did H.D. feel compelled to create this particular prose.

*HERmione*, though composed seven years after *Asphodel*, is a prelude to *Asphodel* and tells the story of H.D.'s years in Pennsylvania. This altered chronology indicates that there are emotional reasons for H.D. writing out of chronological order. There may be both editorial and psychoanalytical explanations for her choice to write about her adolescent years, 1906–1911, in particular, after writing on her war trauma and stillbirth, which happened around 1915. In this article, I endeavour not only to explain such explicit choices for a deconstructed chronologic linearity, a prominent feature of modernist forms, within a Kleinian psychoanalytic framework but also to analyse how the writing process contributed to H.D.'s own 'reparation' process.

*HERmione* is a gestational novel, a prelude to *Asphodel*, that gives birth to H.D. To meet her needs, to symbolically mould herself into 'H.D. the writer' from 'H.D. the imagist', H.D. changes the biographical basis in *HERmione*. Though the novel gives an account of a highly symbolic 'nine months', the real events happened over a period of five years. The novel starts with Hermione, H.D.'s persona, being dismissed from Bryn Mawr in 1906, continues with George Lowndes' (Ezra Pound's- H.D.'s ex-fiance-) dismissal from Wabash college, and Hermione's meeting with Fayne Rabb (Frances Gregg- H.D.'s lesbian love-) in 1910, and terminates with Hermione's breakdown in 1911. By changing the chronology, H.D. gives birth to herself, creating her own internal mother image.

Most of the critics of *HERmione* emphasise that entangled within the story of love and betrayal there is a submerged plot; the story of Hermione's struggle for identity.<sup>1</sup> Friedman and DuPlessis also point out that whilst the first part of the story is dominated by George Lowndes, the second part focuses more on Fayne Rabb.<sup>2</sup> Whilst agreeing with all of these critics, the article would suggest that, though submerged, this *roman à clef* centres on H.D.'s urges to repair and rehabilitate her mother, Helen Doolittle, who is represented by Eugenia in the text. Feminist critics have studied the maternal implications of H.D.'s work. For instance, Friedman and DuPlessis, as well as other critics such as Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, S. Travis, Donna Krolik Hollenberg and Cassandra Laity, elaborate on Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic to interpret the pre-Oedipal narrative of *HERmione*. With these critics, the rhythmic, versatile, repetitious, fluid and regressive writing strategies of *HERmione* – previously considered to be the symptoms of madness<sup>3</sup> – are thus connected to a larger frame of *écriture féminine*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Christine Berni, 'The Recuperated Maternal and the Imposture of Mastery in HD's *Hermione*,' *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 25.1 (1995): 52.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'I Had Two Loves Separate,' in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990)

<sup>3</sup>Janice S. Robinson, *H.D., The Life and Work of An American Poet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 17. For early critics of *HERmione*, see L.S. Dembo, 'H.D. imagist and Her Octopus intelligence', in *H.D. Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1986), pp.209–225. Diana Chisholm reads *HERmione* in connection with Freud's hysteria; Diana Chisholm, *H.D.'s Freudian Poetics: Psychoanalysis in Translation* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 76–81.

<sup>4</sup>See Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, 'Flesh Made Word: Maternal Inscription in HD', *Sagetrieb*, 3 (1984), 27–48. Also see S. Travis, 'A Crack in the Ice: Subjectivity and the Mirror in H.D.'s *HER*', *Sagetrieb*, 6.1. (1987), 123–140. Travis concentrates more on the work of Luce Irigaray and draws a parallel between 'la glace' (French word for both ice and mirror) and H.D.'s need to enter an alternative mirror stage.

Drawing from these brilliant analyses of H.D.'s *HERmione*, reading it as a novel of pre-Oedipal mother, this article will further suggest that H.D. needed to return to the pre-Oedipal mother and use *écriture féminine* strategies not only to create a feminist writing strategy, but also to repair the good mother image that she previously destroyed because of her aggressive instincts, both in *Asphodel* and *Paint it Today*. To substantiate my argument, I will first read Klein's literary examples in parallel with H.D.'s matricide fantasies and reparation in *HERmione*, respectively. *Asphodel* can be read as a novel concerned with separation urges. To put it in Kleinian terms, the novel reveals the paranoid-schizoid position, in which the baby both loves and hates her mother. In *HERmione*, H.D. starts her journey of reparation towards her mother in an attempt to reconstruct the destroyed image. This gestational novel, birthing H.D. the writer, could not have been born without separation; both figuratively without *Asphodel* being written, and literally without separating from the mother. It should not be a surprise then that *HERmione* was written in the same year that H.D.'s mother, Helen Doolittle, died. Though the whole *Madrigal Cycle* becomes testament to H.D.'s search for her mother, *HERmione* should be read as addressing the reparative aspect, in which H.D. understands that she needs to achieve peace with her hatreds in order to come to terms with herself. Before going into a detailed analysis of how I relate reparation to *HERmione*, it will be very helpful to have a succinct explanation of 'reparation'.

### **Melanie Klein and the term 'reparation'**

When Klein discusses different aspects of 'human emotions' in 'Love, Guilt and Reparation (1937)', she clearly indicates that reparation is a fundamental element in love, as well as in all human relationships.<sup>5</sup> The concept of reparation is a developmental stage that children must go through in order to become healthy adults. Emerging from the schizoid-paranoid position, in which the baby sees part-objects, in a depressive position the toddler comes to realise that these part-objects are indeed parts of the same object. This new insight into the object-relation world of the infant brings with it guilt and grief, since the damage that the infant has inflicted upon the bad mother might have harmed the good mother as well. The guilt, begetting fear of losing the good mother, who is a stabilizing psychological *Gestalt* for Kleinian analysis,

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<sup>5</sup>Melanie Klein, 'Love, Guilt and Reparation (1937),' in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 313.

engenders an inner void that is at the core of depression.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Freud's ideas on depression, Klein believes that depression springs from the feeling of having hurt the mother. So, the anticipated reaction should not be one of mourning, 'which upholds the loss, but a work of reparation which conveys the child's experience that it may, through its own love, [...] cancel out the effects of its sadistic act, be they real or imagined.'<sup>7</sup> True reparation, integral to the depressive position, is then possible as long as the guilt is not so overwhelming as to induce despair, and it can generate concern and hope to repair the damage, and save the mother who gratifies.<sup>8</sup>

Reading *HERmione* in conjunction with Klein's paper on 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse' will help to clarify the connections that I draw between Klein's reparation concept and H.D.'s writing. The paper, read before the British Psychoanalytic Society in 1929, both elaborates upon Klein's analysis regarding art production, and introduces, albeit somewhat haphazardly, the term 'reparation' for the first time.<sup>9</sup> Klein starts her analysis with Ravel's opera based on Colette's libretto and focuses merely on the destructive fantasies of a six-year-old boy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ole Andkjaer Olsen, 'Depression and Reparation as Themes in Melanie Klein's Analysis of the Painter Ruth Weber,' *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 27.1 (2004), 36. Though the real name of the painter is, according to Olsen, Ruth Weber, for the sake of clarity I will be using Ruth Kjär, the name that Klein used in her article.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Bott Spillius, et al. *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 470.

<sup>9</sup> This paper in a somewhat haphazard manner introduces for the first time the term 'reparation', which was later to become very significant when Klein fully developed her ideas on the depressive position. See, Olsen, 'Depression and Reparation,' 34.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that in a similar vein to H.D., both Ravel and Colette were obsessed with their mothers. For further details, see Richard Langham Smith, 'Ravel's Operatic Spectacles: L'Heure and L'Enfant', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. by Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 200, 204. Most of Colette's work focuses on the mother-daughter relationship, as well. Like H.D., Colette writes about her life at every stage and 'drew much of her material from her own childhood and her experience of being a Mother or [her mother]'. As Davies notes, 'No other writer appears to have told so much about herself as Colette, to have plundered so markedly her own life in each of its stages in order to create her different fictional aliases.' See Margaret Davies, 'Colette', in *French Novelists 1900-1930: Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 65, edited by Catharine Savage Brosman (Michigan, Gale Research, 1988), 44. For further details on Colette's work and the mother-daughter relation, see Laurie Corbin, *The Mother Mirror, Self-representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 11-44.

Ravel's opera, *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, Klein's first subject, opens with a rebellious six-year-old boy who does not want to do his homework despite his mother's wishes. He simply wants 'to go for a walk in the park! [and he would] like best of all to eat up all the cake in the world.'<sup>11</sup> A mother, who is only presented as a giant skirt with keys and scissors hanging down from her belt, scolds him: 'You shall have *dry bread* and *no sugar* in your tea!' (*emphasis added*).<sup>12</sup> This threat evokes the bad-good mother split, for a good mother is always equated with a nourishing breast. The child, deprived of his dream of a gratifying mother/breast, flies into a rage. With 'all the weapons that the child's sadism has at its disposal,'<sup>13</sup> he starts to destroy all the objects in his room: curtains, wallpaper, teapots and cups.<sup>14</sup> He, in other words, attempts to destroy his mother's body from her body's content. He tries to stab the squirrel in the cage, seizes the cat, pokes the fire furiously, hurls the kettle, swings the tongs like a sword to tear the wall-paper, pulls out the copper pendulum of his grandfather's clock, and pours the ink out of the inkpot.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the fantasy life of children, Klein points out that 'we see what we discover in the analysis of every child: that things represent human beings, and therefore are things of anxiety.'<sup>16</sup> The child equates the squirrel in the cage and the clock's pendulum with his mother's absolute power over him, so he wants to destroy them.<sup>17</sup> His attitude morphs his perception of the objects around him into menacing entities, each taking revenge for what they have suffered. As the inanimate objects carry on with their torture, the boy starts to feel alone and fearful. His grief, however, reaches its peak when he discovers that he has also damaged the book containing the picture of his beloved fairy princess, who can no longer comfort him. 'Half suffocated he takes refuge in the park round the house.'<sup>18</sup>

If we read *HERmione's* opening pages in parallel with Ravel's Opera, we do not witness the first stage where Hermione might have attempted to destroy objects, which are fantasy symbols of the maternal body. *HERmione*, however, directly opens with terrifying and menacing objects that surround

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<sup>11</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art in the Creative Impulse (1929),' in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 210.

<sup>12</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety,' 210.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> These domestic objects appear throughout *HERmione* as well.

<sup>15</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety,' 210.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>17</sup> If we read Klein literally these are plain symbols of the penis in his mother's body.

<sup>18</sup> Debbie Hindle, 'L'Enfant et Les Sortilèges Revisited,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 81 (2000), 1186.



Hermione. Similar to the opera, objects change before Hermione's eyes and threaten her: trees hem her in, a liriiodendron leaf becomes a lily-pad, bees lift her into the air, shadows threaten to cut her, and walls swing about disconcertingly.<sup>19</sup> Before the object world starts to threaten and menace her, Hermione, like the boy in libretto, should have damaged these objects in her fantasy world. The boy starts to damage the objects around him because his mother could not respond to his needs and be a pleasing mother. Thus, to overcome this overpowering bad image of his mother, he directs his aggressive instincts towards symbolic objects. Though these matricidal feelings do not explicitly appear in *HERmione*, Friedman's writings on its manuscripts reveal that they crept into its earlier drafts: 'you never listen to what I say, mama. *I said you ought to be guillotined. Your throat looks so pretty coming out of that ruffle ... like a moon flower*' (*emphasis added*).<sup>20</sup> These matricidal feelings surface more in *Paint it Today*, where Midget wants to kill her mother and compares herself to Orestes.

How did Orestes feel when he held the knife ready to slay his mother? What did Orestes see? What did Orestes think? [...] 'Your mother has betrayed your father,' spoke the present to Orestes. 'Your mother, your mother, your mother,' the present said to Midget, 'has betrayed, or would betray, through the clutch and the tyranny of the emotion, the mind in you, the jewel the king your father gave you as your birthright. Look,' said the present, 'and choose. Here is a knife, your mother. She has betrayed or would betray that gift.'<sup>21</sup>

Similar to the boy in the libretto who abhors her mother for terrorising him by not being the nourishing mother imago, which is invoked by 'no sugar and 'dry bread', H.D. loathed her mother because she could not nourish her daughter with the image that H.D. sought. Both in *Tribute to Freud* and *HERmione*, H.D. reproaches her mother's self-effacement. Despite being gifted in music, her mother denied her musical talent in deference to her uncle, J. Fred Wolle, who later established a Bach festival, for which Bethlehem is chiefly known today.<sup>22</sup> Her mother did not believe in her painting skills, either. H.D. notes: 'I wanted to paint like my mother, though she laughed at her pictures we admired so.'<sup>23</sup> When asked by Freud about whether her mother sang or not, she declared: 'I said she had a resonant

<sup>19</sup> H.D., *HERmione* (London: Virago Press, 1984), 4, 8, 14, 21, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Friedman and DuPlessis, 'I Had Two Loves Separate,' 210.

<sup>21</sup> H.D. *Paint it Today* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 42-43.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Holmes Pearson, 'Foreword', in *Tribute to Freud* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1974), viii.

<sup>23</sup> H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1974), 117.

beautiful voice but that she had some sort of block or repression about singing.<sup>24</sup> 'Obviously', she wrote in *Advent*, 'this is my inheritance. I derive my imaginative faculties through my musician-artist mother.'<sup>25</sup> Though H.D. knew that her mother was her inheritance, she also knew that because of her 'morbidly self-effacing' features, this inheritance was not easy, leading on to her accusing her mother of not being a role model that could have inspired her daughter

Through a vivid portrayal of herself drowning in a bog, H.D. implicitly hints at her anger towards her mother, even if it is not as explicit as in *Paint it Today*:

Her Gart went round in circles. "I am Her," she said to herself; she repeated, "Her, Her, Her." Her Gart tried to hold on to something; drowning she grasped, she caught at a smooth surface, her fingers slipped, she cried in her dementia, "I am Her, Her, Her." Her Gart had no word for her dementia, it was predictable by star, by star-sign, by year [...] She couldn't see the way out of *marsh and bog* (*emphasis added*).<sup>26</sup>

Though this passage is about her dismissal from Bryn Mawr, the story underneath concerns Hermione's anger towards her mother who betrayed her own and her daughter's artistic gifts; Eugenia (surrogate for Helen Doolittle) made Hermione feel insufficient by letting her attempt to adjust to her father's ideals, such as being a 'Marie Curie'. However, she failed in the 'conic section'.<sup>27</sup> 'Science, as Bertram Gart (proxy of her brother) knew it, failed her', she 'failed to reach Bertrand'.<sup>28</sup> This passage, like the libretto, echoes the inner conflict of Hermione. Though there is no explicit anger throughout the passage, an analysis of the passage reveals that it is full of aggressive instincts, as H.D. subtly plays with sentences and words, creating psychological and linguistic twists. At the level of the sentence, the usage of simple, short and to-the-point repetitive and rhythmic sentences is quite significant. 'I am Her [...] repeated Her, Her, Her, [...] I am Her, Her, Her.' This sentence can be compared to a machine gun's rhythmic firing, and it can also be seen as a baby who vomits its aggressive impulses, targeting Mother Nature. Throughout her writing, H.D. identifies star signs and the stars, both the Morning Star (Moravian) and the Evening Star (Venus), with her own birth and the investable inheritance from her (m)other, so her destiny is in the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>26</sup> H.D., *HERmione*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6,18.

stars, in the Mother Nature. That said, the marsh and bog allegory portrays her projected unwanted parts as a result of her aggressive instincts; these two words, which can also be associated with expulsions from the body in the form of defecation, connect to Melanie Klein's ideas as well. According to the Kleinian concept, projecting his/her bad parts onto his/her mother is the innate reaction of the baby. Writing the explosion of bad parts through Mother Nature on paper affords H.D. the opportunity to write her pain and anger out of her body, so she simultaneously becomes the container of the narrative and is contained by the narrative.

Another point to note is that by dissolving the first-person narration into the third, she becomes the object of herself, which can be read as a psychological splitting, providing her with narrative distance to retell her story. I would further suggest that by dividing herself into part-objects and projecting these part-objects into her writing, she mothers herself. The writing itself then becomes a surrogate for H.D.'s mother, and both her writing strategy and the text become her mother in order to nourish her writing self. To write, as Klopfer suggests, means relinquishing the mother.<sup>29</sup> With the initials 'H.D.' which might stand for both Hilda Doolittle and Helen Doolittle, H.D. literally and figuratively mothers herself throughout her writing.

*HERmione*, much like her other autobiographical novels, contains an invocation of nature. H.D. writes in a stream of consciousness about Pennsylvania, her birthplace; her motherland:

Pennsylvania. Names are in people, people are in names. Sylvania. I was born here. People ought to think before they call a place Sylvania. Pennsylvania I am part of Sylvania. Trees. Trees. Trees. Dogwood, liriodendron with its green-yellow tulip blossoms. Trees are in people. People are in trees. Pennsylvania [...] Pennsylvania had her. She would never get away from Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup>

Associating Pennsylvania with a female name, Sylvania, and repeating the sentences 'I am part of Sylvania, and I was born in Sylvania' reinforces the idea that she links her birthplace with her mother. Within the harmony of Mother Nature she finds her mother, on whom she can easily project her bad as well as good parts, and thus reach the depressive position. The writing embraces the aggressive impulses of H.D. She also manages to project her aggressive instincts, specifically the instinct to destroy her mother's body, through aggressive writing techniques such as fragmentation, non-linearity,

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<sup>29</sup> Deborah Kelly Klopfer, *The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D.* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 22.

<sup>30</sup> H.D., *HERmione*, 5.

a regressive writing style and the semiotic lexicon. To reach the lost pre-Oedipal mother who only lived in the pre-language period, she needed to kill the symbolic mother who submitted to the father's law. Then, the violence towards the maternal body, according to Kloefer, turns textual violence against the symbolic.<sup>31</sup>

When we return to the opening passage, we note that the writing creates a 'nauseous' feeling in the reader. This queasy narrative strategy that permeates both *HERmione* and *Asphodel* overlaps with the Kristevan notion of abjection. The abject captures the need to separate from the maternal body, as well as the guilt of damaging it whilst separating. The abject, according to Kristeva, is the first feeling of horror that babies experience when they enter into the struggle of individuation. 'It [...] causes the nauseated repulsion which is a part of abjection.'<sup>32</sup> This 'mingled repulsion and attraction [...] informs the infant's first awareness of the mother as other.'<sup>33</sup> This is, as Klein argues, 'a time dominated by fear and rage: the infant feels helpless and tries to protect [him/]herself with phantasies of destruction carried out on the body of the mother.'<sup>34</sup>

These fantasies of destruction, however, bring with them the guilt of damaging the comforting mother image, whose presence anchors the universe of the child. This ambiguous state, the abject, is further portrayed through Hermione's failure to define herself, as she could not anchor herself to something. '[S]he tried to concentrate on one frayed disc of green, pool or mirror that would refract an image. She was nothing. She must have an image no matter how fluid, how inchoate.'<sup>35</sup> Despite her efforts to '[peer] up into the branches', 'focus one leaf to hold her,' clutch at the upright stairpost, sit stonily before her desk,<sup>36</sup> she continues to 'feel boundaryless,'<sup>37</sup> an 'unincarnated entity.'<sup>38</sup> This strained process of establishing the mother as other and finding a balance between the self and the (m)other will repeatedly surface throughout *HERmione* and become a tense thread linking H.D.'s writing strategies, the narrative itself and Hermione's aggressive unconsciousness.

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<sup>31</sup> Kloefer, *Unspeakable Mother*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Corbin, *The Mother Mirror*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> H.D., *HERmione*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 4, 5, 24, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Berni, 'The Recuperated Maternal,' 52.

<sup>38</sup> H.D., *HERmione*, 10.

This queasy beginning of the novel also acts as a prolepsis to images of engulfment and the eating problems permeating *HERmione*. Throughout the novel, Hermione perpetually writes: 'I am the word AUM. She said Em, Hem, Um, clearing her throat and something either chafed at her throat or 'her breath made a runnel in her throat'.<sup>39</sup> The obsessional writing about her throat, the alimentary canal and the site of voice, as Kloefer points out in 'Flesh Made Word', should be read as interconnected with her anorexic tendencies throughout the novel.<sup>40</sup> These two metaphorical obsessions, engulfment and eating, as Moran points out, suggest 'a problematic relation to the mother and the female body.'<sup>41</sup> That women correlate their ambiguous feelings about the maternal body with images of eating is a frequent point of discussion for Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva.<sup>42</sup> For Kristeva, food loathing is 'the most archaic form of abjection.'<sup>43</sup> To eat, as Kristeva suggests, 'is to merge with the mother; to refuse food may express a desire for separation and autonomy.'<sup>44</sup> Drawing on Klein, Kim Chernin argues that eating disorders may, on the one hand, spring from the daughter's desire to cut off her continuity with the mother. On the other hand, the daughter retains 'a sense of guilt that her needs – particularly her oral needs – have caused her mother's depletion. Not eating, then, is not only an act of separation but is also an act of atonement.'<sup>45</sup>

This discussion of the daughter's ambiguous urges towards her mother embodies my argument about Hermione's anger towards her mother, and her wish to repair the damage caused by these aggressive impulses. To repair the image that she has previously destroyed, the daughter should either recognize her anger and negate it with love for her mother, or deal with it without making any further damages to the internalized good image of the mother. To break free, as already argued, means, terrifyingly, to 'kill the mother,'<sup>46</sup> so this attempt to separate from the mother engenders guilt, both in Hermione and in the boy of the libretto. What is implicitly acknowledged in *HERmione* is explicitly revealed in *Paint it Today*. Just after recording the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 29, 32, 38, 175, 193.

<sup>40</sup> Kloefer, 'Flesh Made Word,'38. H.D., *HERmione*, 35, 87, 122.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Moran, 'Unholy Meanings: Maternity, Creativity, and Orality in Katherine Mansfield', *Feminist Studies*, 17.1 (1991), 106.

<sup>42</sup> Moran, 'Unholy Meanings,' 106.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Moran, 'Unholy Meanings,' 106.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Moran, 'Unholy Meanings,' 107.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 220, 278.

passage with 'Orestes', the reader is plunged into another interior monologue of Midget, which reveals the guilt that arose as a result of her desire to kill her mother, or in other words, as a result of her desire to separate from the mother

Do you remember those marzipan fruits she used to get you? She redressed that hopeless doll many, many times when any other mother would have flung it on the dust heap. What of that birthday when she put morning glories through the string of every birthday parcel and addressed each of the eight separate parcels with a separate pet name? What of that wonderful convalescence from scarlet fever when you found on your pillow – 'Stop', said the mind of Midget.<sup>47</sup>

This passage overlaps perfectly with Klein's idea of the guilt the baby feels as a result of the damage that it has done to their loved one. Midget's mind, however, refuses to listen to her guilty feelings and continues with her explosion: 'you are tyrannizing me. You are hurting me.'<sup>48</sup> These explicit revelations become the textual unconscious of *HERmione* and are disguised within the prevalent use of ellipses.

These attacks on the mother's body, to rob it of its content, namely the father's penis, faeces and children, according to Klein, engender anxiety for fear that the mother might in her turn rob the little girl/boy of the contents of her/his body.<sup>49</sup> This fear is also portrayed in Colette's libretto through the image of the mother with the 'scissors' symbol, corresponding with the mother's power to destroy and cut the internal objects of the boy's body, reminding of Demeter myth. When this myth is read with this in mind, we notice that it illustrates this phenomenon. The Hymn to Demeter depicts the transformation of the lovely Demeter into the dreadful mother, once she is separated from her daughter. Demeter, anguished by the separation from her daughter, creates the most dreadful and cruel year over the 'all-nourishing earth', to the point that she may almost 'destroy' the whole race by 'robbing' them of all their gifts.<sup>50</sup> In Klein's view, this anxiety represents the little girl's

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<sup>47</sup> H.D., *Paint it Today*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Fairfield states that 'the *kore*, [Persephone's name before entering the underground world] *par excellence*, represents the child of either sex struggling both to escape and to retain its feminine identification with its mother.' See S. Fairfield, 'The Kore Complex: the Myths and Some Unconscious Fantasies,' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 75 (1994), 249.

<sup>50</sup> See Beth J. Seelig, 'The Rape of Medusa in The Temple of Athena: Aspects of Triangulation in The Girl,' *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 83.4 (2002), 901-902. Herman discusses that Persephone actually wanted to put some distance between her mother and herself. See Nini Herman, *Too Long a Child: The Mother-Daughter Dyad* (London: Whurr Publishers, 1999), 48-72. Hirsch's version of telling the story recalls and directly connects to the images of Kleinian

earliest danger-situation and becomes the deepest anxiety of all for girls. 'At a later stage of development the content of the dread', as Klein further remarks, 'changes from that of an attacking mother to the dread that the real, loving mother may be lost and that the girl will be left solitary and forsaken.'<sup>51</sup>

Overlapping with Klein's theory, the guilt of damaging the maternal body is revealed in *HERmione* through Hermione's fear of being left alone and deprived of a loving mother who can soothe her. Her fears are revealed immediately after recording this queasy beginning of the novel and find their voice in the following lines: 'She wasn't now any good for anything [...] Nothing held her, she was nothing holding to this thing.'<sup>52</sup> '[S]he was good for nothing.'<sup>53</sup> 'Everything was something to everyone but nothing was anything to her', 'it is true 'Venice' had meant nothing.'<sup>54</sup> 'I'm too strong and I'm nothing and I'm frightened', 'there would be nothing left ... nothing left', 'nothing could bring the thing back, no words could make the thing solid and visible and therefore to be coped with.'<sup>55</sup> 'I know nothing, knowing everything.'<sup>56</sup> 'One I love, two I love. I am in love with ... *nothing*.'<sup>57</sup> Boy, in a similar vein, interjects: 'they love each other. They are happy. They have forgotten me ... I am alone.'<sup>58</sup>

### Conclusion

In short, reading these two works together shed insight into how- and why- H.D. felt compelled to create this particular prose, as well as how similar destructive fantasies affected H.D.'s life and decisions paving the way to her being a writer. Throughout *HERmione*, H.D. constantly wrote about how desperately she needed to create an image, an identity, for -of- herself. To create an image of herself, she needed her mother: 'Paradoxical as that may sound, girls need their mother's cooperation in detaching themselves from them.'<sup>59</sup> H.D. needs to find a way to sail between the 'Scylla of Electra's

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psychoanalysis. See Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 28-42.

<sup>51</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety,' 217.

<sup>52</sup> H.D., *HERmione*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 29, 44.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 176, 182, 213.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 216-217.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>58</sup> Hindle, 'L'Enfant et Les Sortilèges Revisited,' 1186.

<sup>59</sup> Hendrika C. Freud, *Electra vs Oedipus: The Drama of the Mother-Daughter Relationship*, trans. by Marjolijn de Jager (Sussex: Routledge, 2011), 2.

murderous hate and the Charybdis of total symbiosis.<sup>60</sup> In London, the expatriate H.D., likely aware of her mother-fixation, began to write to repair the mother she 'killed'. To repair her mother image and to protect the ego from total despair, writing *Madrigal Cycle* Novels, particularly *HERmione*, helped H.D. to repair the mother she previously destroyed in her other autobiographical novels. Recognising and accepting that both her bad and good mother actually were the one she needed became the catalyst to mould herself into H.D. the writer and to see again ahead.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



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