H. D. (HILDA DOOLITTLE)

**Essays**

**TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE**

Summer, 1998

H.D. and "The Contest": archaeology of a Sapphic gaze.(poet Hilda Doolittle's work; Greek poet Sappho)

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What need - yet to sing love, love must first shatter us.

- H.D., "Fragment Forty" (Collected Poems [CP] 175)

Scholars have long documented the relationships between Sappho and her poetic successors.(1) More recently, a few critics have unearthed those between Sappho and H.D. Thirteen years ago, for example, Susan Gubar insisted that "Sappho's status as a female precursor empowered a number of female modernists" (44), including H.D., and enabled them to "try to solve the problem of poetic isolation and imputed inferiority" (46) that they experienced as women writers. Two years later, while acknowledging that H.D. never explicitly names Sappho in the poems of Sea Garden as the "crucial source of lyric power" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 529), Eileen Gregory viewed Sea Garden as "a consciously crafted whole" (536) in which H.D. "attempts to recover the imagination of goddess-centered Lesbos" as exemplified by Sappho, "the first love-possessed lyricist" (528-29). (2) Robert Babcock, indicating that Thomas Swann was the critic who "established a canon of [H.D.'s] Sapphic verses" (43), extended Gregory's thesis in 1990 by demonstrating that H.D.'s "Pursuit" from Sea Garden was based specifically on Sappho's fragment 105. Babcock proposed that "the failure of [H.D.'s] contemporary critics to recognize the sources of her work or to treat her writing as a serious engagement with a literary tradition may have led H.D. to begin explicitly detailing sources in her later books" (44). Babcock referred to "Pursuit" as "H.D.'s earliest published version of Sappho" and concluded that it could "contribute to a fuller appreciation of the range and depth of the Sapphic influence on her writing" (46).

Today, seven years after Babcock's work, it is my intention to add my voice in order to reenvision the link between Sappho and H.D. However, I will argue that Sappho's influence on H.D. extends beyond what Gubar labels the "dynamic of collaboration" (58); beyond what Babcock identifies as H.D.'s "startling but simple" treatment of an image as an image (46); and beyond what Gregory calls the "aesthetic of H.D.'s early work," which conjures and reenacts the "experienced power of the image" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 545). I suggest that Sappho also teaches H.D. "the experienced power" and sexual erotics of a gaze that initiates not a fixed subject/object exchange but an oscillating sense of subjectivity. In this essay I demonstrate that H.D., rather than encountering a male-dominated tradition of "the gaze," creates a gaze influenced by what she interprets as the "viewing" employed by Sappho in the sixth century BC.

In the first section of this essay, I explain why readings that rely solely on ways in which male authors have oppressed women without including ways in which female authors are part of a women's literary tradition can be reductive - in a destructive as well as an analytic sense. I then examine the literary tradition of Sappho that would eventually influence H.D. In the second section, I attempt to reconstruct the ways in which I believe H.D. inherited and interpreted that tradition. In the third section, I examine H.D.'s early poem "The Contest" from Sea Garden as part of a Sapphic vision of poetry that is something other than an oppositional, perpetuating, or marginal discourse against a "patriarchal" tradition. And in the concluding section, I speculate on why H.D. might have refrained from both mere imitation and direct translation of Sappho. I dare more than the singer offering her lute,

I offer more than the lad singing at your steps,

I give you my praise and this: the love of my lover for his mistress.

- H.D., "Fragment Forty-one" (CP 184)

I want to explain my use of the terms archaeology and gaze in this essay's title. The latter undoubtedly recalls film theorists such as Laura Mulvey and her articulations of visual pleasure and the "male gaze."(3) Considering H.D.'s venture into film making and film criticism in the years from 1927 through 1933, I do not discourage this association. But I also use the term gaze in a broader - less theoretical and less...
gendered - way. I use gaze to suggest not only a steadily intense way of looking at, but also a way of looking after (following with the eye), looking into (inquiring with the mind), looking up to (regarding with admiration), looking upon (considering and beholding), looking ahead (imagining and desiring), and looking back (reviewing and returning). I describe a Sapphic gaze as a specifically multiple way of seeing grounded in both historical and cultural moments of human sexual and erotic development that H.D. believed she could recuperate, attempt to make whole, and hope to eventually transcend.

Thus my use of the term archaeology, like that of gaze, may recall a specific theorist: Michel Foucault. Regarding knowledge, Foucault insists that he does not "study the beginning in the sense of first origin," but rather "relative beginnings" ("Order of Things" 57); and that he uses archaeology most explicitly "to designate something that would be the description of the archive and not at all. . . the bringing to light of the bones of the past" (65). I emphasize Foucault's definition because my own - at least in this essay's context - appears to be both what he declares his is and what he declares it is not. That is, while I am not "searching for the first solemn moment," I am searching for "foundations" and am not at all "blobbered by the idea of excavations" (57). In fact, the literal Egyptian excavations of Sappho's fragmentary poems in 1897 are central to the renewed Sappho scholarship at the turn of the century and to H.D.'s own 1923 visit to Egypt. Foucault, in order to distance himself from them, refers to "the regular historians" as those who see and reveal "continuities" (58). H.D. might be less dismissive of such historians. I believe that H.D. saw continuities - not necessarily easily, not without drama and sacrifice, not by means of conventional poetic tropes - and attempted to reveal them as they were revealed to her by way of a Sapphic gaze.

The Sapphic gaze, however, is not a way of looking that H.D. simply unearths and adopts; it is not Sappho's gaze. Rather, it is H.D.'s own gaze, H.D.'s way of looking (at, after, into, up to, upon, ahead, back) that she develops from Sappho's fragmented archives. The Sapphic gaze is H.D.'s construction of vision and viewing that relies not on narrative - there can be no logical progression of events and actions laid bare from a scattering of papyrus scraps and pottery shards - and not on spectacle, as in the "male gaze," but on analytic description. This description does more than image a scene and fix it in the mind; it breaks down an object into its constituent elements without necessarily establishing an explicit relationship between the parts and the "whole" - neither as such a relationship may or may not have existed before the analysis, nor as it may or may not come to exist after the analysis. Moreover, this description does not establish a fixed relationship between the subject and the object. Such a way of analytically describing comes to H.D. by way of the material condition of Sappho's archives; all that H.D. has available to her are parts, elements, fragments of what once must have been whole poems. In this sense, H.D.'s Sapphic gaze is not a vision of archetypal synthesis but one of prototypical analysis.(4)

And yet, as we shall see in the discussions of "Notes on Thought and Vision" and "The Wise Sappho" below, H.D. eventually theorizes the (re) construction of a whole. That is, she does visualize by way of fragments a future moment of what Page duBois calls "the restoration of lost wholes" (35). Her Sapphic gaze, then, is not only analytically descriptive, it is also intermediary - a stage of development that is scopophilic in nature. Freud describes scopophilic desire as that which aims at "pleasure in looking" (23), one of the "intermediate relations to the sexual object. . . which lie on the road towards copulation and are recognized as being preliminary sexual aims" (15). This differs from the voyeuristic impulse attributed to a "male" gaze in which sexual desire is satisfied not only by one's looking but by one's looking and not being seen. What makes visual impressions so exciting, says Freud, is that the "concealment of the body. . . keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole" (22, emphasis mine). Similarly, the concealment of Sappho's "whole" poetry keeps H.D.'s curiosity in the fragments awake. She seeks to complete Sappho by revealing hidden parts. To paraphrase Freud, lingering over the intermediate sexual aim of looking offers H.D. a possibility of directing some proportion of her libido onto her artistic aims (23); she emulates Sappho's fragments in order to emphasize the fragmentation of a subject position she herself experiences as woman/object and poet/subject, but also in order to reconfigure that emphasis. As duBois suggests, "The self constituted against a background of disorder can be a self of pleasure and authority that recognizes its construction of itself out of fragmentation" (75). Sappho's fragments provide a literary and literal site where H.D. can visualize subject/object and female/male encounters in ways that extend beyond oppositional discourses. In this sense, H.D.'s Sapphic gaze is intersubjective because it is not directed toward an object but is held in relation to another subject.

H.D.'s project, then, is radical rather than merely a reaction to more recent poetic developments. When Nancy Vickers discusses the ways in which Petrarch seems to reduce Laura's image to "a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects" (266) in his poetry, she insists that this kind of "description. . . extends well beyond the confines of his own poetic age" to become the "authoritative" description of "feminine beauty" (265). Vickers views Petrarch as the originator of the gaze. At the conclusion of her essay, Vickers points out what is "understandab[e]" in the "praise" Petrarch's
breast, since once I look at you for a moment, I can't speak any longer, sweetness of your laughter: yes, that - I swear it - sets the heart to shaking inside my whatever - listening from closeby to the sweetness of your voice as you talk, the In my eyes he matches the gods, that man who sits there facing you - any man and Anne Carson all address in their studies:(7) that even Petrarch will engage. Here is her fragment 31, which duBois, Joan DeJean, Let us turn to Sappho's work and explore the ways in which she develops a "gaze" subordinate to nor subordinating the stereotype because no such Petrarchan or emulate Sappho and extend a Sapphic gaze. This gaze offers itself as neither rejecting DuPlessis's articulation of a Keatsian "foundational cluster," H.D.'s lyrics Vickers's exploration of a Petrarchan strategy of description, rather than imitating or varied - as our evaluative tools should be. Rather than extending or distorting Petrarchan/foundational strategies. But I suggest that H.D.'s options here are more pronouns and by speaking directly to the object - "jostle, if only slightly," the concepts of the "scattered" and "silenced" female body to H.D.'s poem "The Contest," traditions in Europe to include all of world history. Applying Vickers's and DuPlessis's - unintentionally, to be sure - ultimately universalize Petrarchan strategies and foundational clusters just as archaeologists used to generalize the sequences of cultural changes by way of technological traditions in Europe to include all of world history. Applying Vickers's and DuPlessis's concepts of the "scattered" and "silenced" female body to H.D.'s poem "The Contest," we may be tempted to agree that H.D. does, indeed - by changing the gender of the pronouns and by speaking directly to the object - "jostle, if only slightly," the Petrarchan/foundational strategies. But I suggest that H.D.'s options here are more varied - as our evaluative tools should be. Rather than extending or distorting Vickers's exploration of a Petrarchian strategy of description, rather than imitating or rejecting DuPlessis's articulation of a Keatsian "foundational cluster;" H.D.'s lyrics emulate Sappho and extend a Sapphic gaze. This gaze offers itself as neither subordinate to nor subordinating the stereotype because no such Petrarchan or Keatsian stereotypes exist.(6)

Let us turn to Sappho's work and explore the ways in which she develops a "gaze" that even Petrarch will engage. Here is her fragment 31, which duBois, Joan DeJean, and Anne Carson all address in their studies:(7)

In my eyes he matches the gods, that man who sits there facing you - any man whatever - listening from closeby to the sweetness of your voice as you talk, the sweetness of your laughter: yes, that - I swear it - sets the heart to shaking inside my breast, since once I look at you for a moment, I can't speak any longer,
but my tongue breaks down, and then all at once a subtle fire races inside my skin, my eyes can't see a thing and a whirring whistle thums at my hearing, 

cold sweat covers me and a trembling takes ahold of me all over: I'm greener than the grass and appear to myself to be little short of dying.

But all must be endured, since even a poor

Here the poem ends. Whatever precedes, whatever follows, whatever narrative - if any - that may have once existed is lost to us.

We notice immediately in this particular lyric the presence of three figures: the first-person "I" speaker, the second-person "you," and a third-person "he." Only the third person is identified by gender, and only he remains outside the dialogue of the poem. At first we may assume the speaker intends to salute him, this man who "matches the gods" (1), but it soon becomes clear that he - like all men, "any man whatever" (2) - shares the speaker's infatuation for the second-person "you" - "the sweetness of your / voice as you talk, the/sweetness of your laughter" (3-5). Here we may make another assumption: the speaker's objectification of the "you" will continue beyond mere voice and laughter. But instead, the speaker's attention turns to herself. Already we see deviations from DuPlessis's definition of the lyric voice as that of a man speaking to men about a woman.(8) Objectifying the "you" sets the speaker's "heart to shaking inside my breast" (6); looking at "you" prevents her from speaking (8-9), from seeing (11), and from hearing (12). In other words, objectifying the "you" causes the speaker linguistically to begin fragmenting herself - an active rather than passive process. All her senses are affected. She is covered in "cold sweat" as "a trembling takes / ahold of me all over" (13-14), and she is left a "little / short of dying" (15-16).

Compare Sappho's objectification of object and fragmentation of subject to Petrarch's. In Sonnet 3, Petrarch's speaker falls "a captive, Lady, to the sway / Of your swift eyes" (4-5) in much the same way that Sappho's speaker falls captive to the sweet voice. The power of Petrarch's "Lady's" eyes makes the speaker a "prisoner" (4) again in Sonnet 61. As Sappho's speaker articulates the effects of her beloved on her own heart, breast, voice, eyes, ears, and skin, so Petrarch's speaker blesses "the first sweet pain... / Which burnt my heart" and "the shafts which shock my breast. / And even the wounds which Love delivered there" (5-8). Page duBois points out that in Sappho's fragment the speaker "herself sees the disorder in the body in love, sees herself objectified as a body in pieces, disjointed, a broken set of organs, limbs, bodily functions" (70). Petrarch's speaker sees himself, the body in love, the same way - a body in pieces - which undermines any reading exclusively emphasizing broken objects and unified subjects. Was he influenced by Sappho? David M. Robinson acknowledges that Sappho was relatively unknown in medieval Europe (134), but Petrarch, who actively searched for Greek and Roman manuscripts and became the "first" writer of the Renaissance, refers to Sappho in both his Triumph of Love and Tenth Eclogue (Robinson 136). As we can see, the objectification that leads to bodily fragmentation of both object and subject may be exemplified and eroticized in Petrarch, but it does not originate here. According to duBois, it is in Sappho that we find "representation of a new stage in the thinking of existence" (7):

Sappho and the poets who are her near contemporaries are among the first to inhabit fully the first person singular, to use the word "I" to anchor their poetic speech, to hollow out for their listeners and readers the cultural space for individual subjectivity. . . We see in the work of Sappho the very beginnings of this process, the construction of selfhood, of the fiction of subjectivity at its origins. (6)

H.D. may or may not have considered subjectivity a "fiction," but she recognized it as a construct and clearly saw in Sappho its "origins."

[Why were those slight words and the violets you gathered of such worth?]

- H.D., "Fragment Sixty-eight" (CP 188)

To expand this consideration of the gaze that H.D. articulates in "The Contest" as Sapphic rather than Petrarchan, we need to establish a women's literary tradition - the relationship between H.D. and Sappho - that, if not completely independent of Petrarchan influence, does not rely upon it. H.D.'s familiarity with the Greek poet's work is clear as early as 1921, with the publication of Hymen, H.D.'s second collection of poetry, which included "Fragment 113" (CP 131-32) and its epigraph from Sappho, "Neither honey nor bee for me." But H.D. tells us that her interest in Sappho began much earlier. Although "Fragment Thirty-six" (CP 165-68), based on Sappho's fragment, "I know not what to do: / my mind is divided," does not appear until the 1924 volume Heliodora, H.D. writes in 1937 that the poem "definitely, [was] written at Corfe Castle, in 1916, the year conscription came in" ("A Note on Poetry" 1287). And while we may not be certain of the date of "The Wise Sappho," H.D.'s prose tribute to her predecessor published posthumously in 1982, we can safely assume that it originated as early as 1920.(9)

In addition, H.D. was familiar with and enchanted by Algernon Charles Swinburne's translations of Sappho.(10) In a 1925 review of a contemporary compilation and translation by Edwin Marion Cox, The Poems of Sappho, H.D. marvels that Cox can
I feel that in the gallery or galaxy of translations of Sappho that [this] particular translation of Swinburne is forever and ever wedded to that particular fragment. That no one, no matter how notable he may be has any right to omit Swinburne from any volume purporting to be an up to date compilation of critical notes and translations.

It is possible that H.D. shared Swinburne’s enthusiasm for Sappho. Only two years before the publication of Sea Garden (and thus “The Contest”), a posthumous essay by Swinburne appeared in The Living Age. Here Swinburne wrote:

Judging even from the mutilated fragments fallen within our reach from the broken altar of her sacrifice of song, I for one have always agreed with all Grecian tradition in thinking Sappho to be beyond all question and comparison the very greatest poet that ever lived. (qtd. in Robinson 11)

The fact that all that exists of Sappho’s oeuvre are “mutilated fragments” may be a concern for H.D., but not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle. In “The Wise Sappho,” she admits that she is “inclined to visualize these broken sentences and unfinished rhythms as rocks - perfect rock shelves and layers of rock between which flowers by some chance may grow but which endure when the staunch blossoms have perished” (58). But it is on these rocks - indeed, from these rocks - that “[t]he name of muse and goddess and of human woman merge” (64). As I pointed out in the discussion of archaeology above, H.D. views Sappho as a source of poetic, artistic, and cultural continuity. And it is probably not incidental that rocks - and the triumvirate of muse/goddess/woman - “endure” when we recall the last line of Sappho’s fragment above: “But all must be endured” or “dared.” H.D.’s Sea Garden poems are the flowers that grow from the enduring rock of Sappho’s fragments, and her Sapphic gaze is that which dares to view and visualize from the intersubjective position of muse and goddess and woman.

While postmodern critiques of them may vary, fragments, for H.D., are part of a larger, recoverable whole. (11) She begins “Notes on Thought and Vision” with a divided - fragmented - self: “Three states or manifestations of life: body, mind, over-mind” (17). Later in the essay she rethinks and restates her claim, saying, “I think at last I have my terms clear. There are three states or manifestations - sub-conscious mind, conscious mind, over-conscious mind” (49). Fragments, symbolized by Sappho’s lyrics, can be recovered. She has already insisted that “we cannot have spirit without body, the body of nature, or the body of individual men and women” (48). While “[i]t is necessary to work, to strive toward the understanding of the overmind,” once such understanding is achieved “[o]ur concern is with the body” (50). But, H.D. asks, “Where does the body come in? What is the body?” (51). She ultimately concludes that “the body is not a very rare or lovely thing. The body seem[s] an elementary, unbeautiful and transitory form of life,” and yet the body has “its use,” functioning as an oyster with a pearl; “the body, with all its emotions and fears and pain in time casts off the spirit, a concentrated essence,” which is not itself the body but is created by the body “itself” (51). This supports her earlier declaration that the body, which “can be used as a means of approach to ecstasy” (46), is “like a lump of coal” that “fulfills its highest function when it is being consumed” (47). This also indicates that she views the body as somehow intermediary, a stage - albeit an important one - toward unearthing an understanding of the over-mind and a construction of subjectivity.

H.D. writes that “[t]he best Greek sculpture used the bodies of young athletes as Lo-fu [her fictional Chinese poet] used the branch of the fruit tree”; she insists that “[t]he fruit tree and the human body are both receiving stations, capable of storing up energy,” energy that “can be transmitted only to another body or another mind that is in sympathy with it” (46-47). What is concrete and whole - the body, the tree - can be fragmented - the body into arms and eyes, the tree into branches and leaves. And what is fragmented can be recovered and transcended, reassembled and transformed. H.D. writes:

Lo-fu was a poet. To him that apple branch, outside in the orchard, existed as an approach to something else. As the body of a man’s mistress might be said to exist as the means of approach to something else, that is as a means or instrument of feeling or happiness, so the branch in the orchard existed to Lo-fu as the means of attaining happiness, as a means of completing himself, as a means of approach to ecstasy. (45)

H.D.’s Lo-fu and his apple branch reveals a striking similarity to Sappho and another of her fragments. Wharton translates Sappho as follows in fragment 93: “As the sweet-apple blushes on the end of the bough, the very end of the bough, which the gatherers overlooked, nay overlooked not but could not reach.” Sappho’s speaker draws our attention to an apple left unpicked not because it is unseen but because it is unattainable. Anne Carson calls this one “of the tactics of incompleteness by which Sappho sustains desire and desirability in the poem” (69). We do not know how Sappho’s speaker regards the apple/object that cannot be secured, but we do know...
how Petrarch’s speaker regards the beloved/object who cannot be secured: when the beloved departs - after all, “Love” is only a “guest” (“Sonnet 61” 6) - the speaker is left with “signs” and “tears” (11) to bless “that thought of thoughts which is her [the beloved’s] own, / Of her, her only, of herself alone” (13-14).

H.D.’s Lo-fu suffers no such despair. Remember Freud’s discussion of the potential for curiosity in the body to be sublimated toward art. The apple branch allows Lo-fu to move beyond “a mind that may be conscious in the ordinary, scholarly, literal sense of the word” to an “over-conscious” mind that enables him “to enter into a whole life” (42, emphasis mine). H.D. tells us that observing the branch, Lo-fu’s “conscious mind ceased wondering and, being an artist, his intensity and concentration were of a special order” (43). His gaze moves - looking at/after/into/up to/upon/ahead/back - constantly from the apples, to their stems, to the branches, to “two leaves, continents to be explored in a leisurely manner lest his mind passing one carelessly from vein to vein” should miss any detail; but Lo-fu’s mind has “only begun its search” (44). H.D. insists: “Lo-fu looked at that branch. He really did look at it. He really did see it” in such vividness that when he closes his eyes it is all the more clear. And it transforms: “That branch was his mistress now, his love. . . . Here, in his little room, the world had ceased to exist. It was shut off, shut out, forgotten. His love, his apple branch, his subtle mistress, was his. And having possessed her with his great and famished soul, she was his forever” (44-45). Petrarch’s speakers objectify and are left stricken, anguished, and bleeding. H.D.’s Lo-fu also objectifies, but by way of the Sapphic gaze that H.D. has excavated, Lo-fu moves beyond the eroticism of fragmentation to the ecstasy of wholeness. DuBois warns, “We need to be conscious of an ongoing tension between our desire to register fragmentation and our desire to invent integrity” (20). Of course, just because H.D. describes Lo-fu in his moment of transcendent fusion - and, thus, “invent[s] integrity” - does not mean H.D. herself experiences it. But she clearly longs for its possibility.

My mind is quite divided, my minds hesitate, so perfect matched, I know not what to do: each strives with each as two white wrestlers standing for a match, ready to turn and clutch yet never shake muscle nor nerve nor tendon. . . .

- H.D., “Fragment Thirty-six” (CP 167)

H.D.’s speaker in “The Contest” is in the intermediate stage of the Sapphic gaze - the stage Lo-fu eventually transcends. The speaker here has only eyes. And the eye, as Freud insists, is “the [erotogenic] zone most remote from the sexual object, but it is the one which, in the situation of wooing an object, is liable to be the most frequently stimulated by the particular quality of excitation whose cause, when it occurs in a sexual object, we describe as beauty” (75). Because “The Contest” has been neglected in much of the H.D. criticism, I offer it below in its entirety:

I.

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

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

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

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

II.

You stand rigid and mighty - granite and the ore in rocks; a great band clasps your forehead and its heavy twists of gold.

You are white - a limb of cypress bent under a weight of snow.

You are splendid, your arms are fire; you have entered the hill-straits - a sea treads upon the hill-slopes.

III.

Myrtle is about your head, you have bent and caught the spray: each leaf is sharp against the lift and furrow of your bound hair.

The narcissus has copied the arch of your slight breast: your feet are citron-flowers, your knees, cut from white-ash, your thighs are rock-cistus.

Your chin lifts straight from the hollow of your curved throat. your shoulders are level - they have melted rare silver for their breadth. (CP 12-14)

Before exploring the ways in which this poem exemplifies a Sapphic gaze, let me begin with a brief discussion of some of the poem’s formal concerns. The symmetrical
aspects of its form reflect, I think, H.D.'s interest in both Sappho and classical poetry. (13) Gilbert Highet says, "[Symmetry means a balanced proportion of parts corresponding to their importance in the general structure" (332), and one way symmetry is created and mainained is by the use of the "tricolon," a "unit made up of three parts," which Highet exemplifies by way of Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, for the people" (334). (14) H.D. recognizes this symmetrical device "invented by Greek teachers of rhetoric" and expands it by employing a tripartite structure in "The Contest," which consists of three parts comprising 10 stanzas. (15) Part 1 contains four stanzas - an opening quatrain, followed by a tristich, and two more quatrains; parts 2 and 3 contain three stanzas each - two quatrains framing a distich in part 2, and three consecutive quintets in part 3. The first and third parts contain 15 lines each and frame the second, center part (which contains 10 lines) in much the same way as the second part itself is framed by the two quatrains around the distich. Each of the total 40 lines varies in irregular rhythms of dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, and pentameter so that the alternating line lengths - two, three, four, and five stresses - mirror the alternating stanza sizes - two, three, four, and five lines - in order to underscore classical symmetry.

H.D. utilizes two different methods of imitating (neo)classical proportion in diction and syntax: chiasmus and anaphora. (16) Chiasmus is the symmetrical balance of word order through reversal. We see it in the poem's first two sentences. H.D. begins with a loose sentence: "Your stature is modelled / with straight tool-edge". The common subject-verb-object construction is followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by "with." This same preposition opens the poem's second sentence, which is - in a syntactic reversal of the first - periodic: "With the turn and grasp of your wrist / . . . / there is a glint like worn brass."

The anaphora in "The Contest" complements the chiasmus and suggests a stability that the content of the poem, as we shall see, resists. Where chiasmus creates, although in reverse, a balance of word order through symmetry, anaphora creates such a balance through repetition. We find it in the same sentence on consecutive lines - "and under" (9), "and between" (10); we find it in nonconsecutive lines but at the beginning of consecutive sentences - "You are white" (19), "You are splendid!" (21); we find it in nonconsecutive lines and in different sentences in different syntactical arrangement - "of your bound hair" (30), "of your slight breast" (32). Finally, we see anaphora in the lines connecting the final two stanzas: "your feet are" (33), "your knees, cut" (34), "your thighs are" (35), "your chin lifts" (36), and "your shoulders are" (38). Here, anaphora emphasizes the speaker's fragmentation and objectification of the "you." The momentum created by the culmination of body parts at the end of the poem is both undermined by the repetitious balance effected by the anaphora and underscored, since repetition is not always merely repetitious. (17)

After exploring the symmetry created by chiasmus and anaphora, and detailing the symmetry of the stanzas, we see that "The Contest" appears to be written in a closed form; on the page it looks balanced, as though it strives for perfection. But if closed, the form is not fixed. It may inherit certain familiar elements of syntactic structure, but there are no identifiable line or stanza patterns that can be identified as Renaissance or Romantic - such as blank verse, heroic couplet, or terza rima. In addition, "The Contest" displays no Renaissance or Romantic conventions of context in attitude or theme. The poem's title directs us to read the text as a narrative; H.D.'s use of the definite article "the" in the title signals that this contest is specific and particular. Yet we are never fully aware of what this contest is, what it is about, or who the participants are - despite Swann's suggestion that the poem is "established in a classical background" by its images that "suggest Greek athletes" (4). Here "the contest" does not function deictically; that is, as a phrase it is not prepared for and is not explained elsewhere in the text. Instead, we are immediately involved in a second-person discourse, in medias res, as it were, without introduction to an implied "I" speaker or to the "you" addressed.

Unlike the speaker in Sappho's fragment 31 above, H.D.'s first-person speaker is implied only by the presence of the second-person "you." When an "I" speaker is present, as in Sappho's fragment, we have a sense, if not always a clear one, of the speaker's personal stakes in the action of the work. We attribute the poem's words to the speaker so that diction becomes a form of characterization. But the invisible "I" of H.D.'s poem creates tension. Who is addressing "you"? Do we, as readers, connect the "you" to ourselves? Could it be the speaker addressing herself? Is the "you" even human? H.D.'s choice of point of view evokes a quality of indeterminacy. The "you" is depicted as a sculpture - either relief or statue - whose "stature is modelled / with straight tool-edge" (1-2), one who is "chiselled like rocks / that are eaten into by the sea" (3-4). The images of sculpture out of both stone and wood persist throughout the poem: in part 1, the word "torso" denotes the sculptured form used to represent the human trunk; in part 2, the "you" stands "rigid and mighty - / granite and ore in rocks" (16-17); and in part 3 the "you" has knees "cut from white-ash" (34) and wears a laurel of sorts that is "sharp / against the lift and furrow / of your bound hair" (28-30).

Just as the absence of a visible "I" speaker creates tension, the use of the present tense works to create immediacy and intimacy. Notice that H.D. does not mirror Petrarch but Sappho in her use of verb tense. Petrarch's lyrics in the past tense imply the actuality and the completion of events and actions; they also imply reflection and evaluation on the part of the speaker: in Sonnet 3 the speaker looks back on the
morning that "Love caught me naked to his shaft" (9) but left the "Lady" untouched (14); and in Sonnet 61 he blesses the Lady for bringing him "the sonnet-sources of my fame" (12). But for Sappho and H.D., use of the present tense allows them to exploit the intensity of the moment unfolding at hand. Sappho's speaker declares, "I can't / speak any longer" (7-8), which Jeffrey Duban points out makes her "helplessness . . . complete. For a poet in a basically oral culture, to lose the power of articulation is to lose the essence of identity" (108). H.D.'s speaker has no identity to retain or lose. All that exists is the moment - are the moments? - of observing the "you." Is the speaker at the center of the objectification or merely its witness? The implied "I" speaker's relation to the "you" is significant in its present-tense ambiguity, in its unbound dealings with time, and in its absence. To paraphrase Carson on Sappho, H.D.'s speaker does not record from past-tense security the history of a love affair, but records the anxious and present-tense instant of desire (4).

While the "you" of part 1 is inactive, "you" is still observed by the speaker in a position of movement; this object is neither static nor dynamic. The "glint like worn brass" (7) comes from "the turn and grasp of your wrist / and the chord's stretch" (5-6). The "you" here appears to be caught in the moment of pulling back the string of a bow in preparation for shooting. But the arrow has not been loosed: the muscles in the breast are "taut" (8), those of the hips are "clenched" (10). In part 2, the "you" is captured in an ambiguous stance that the speaker calls "splendid" (22) while clearly weary, resembling "a limb of cypress / bent under a weight of snow" (20-21). Part 3 presents a "you" that H.D. describes as "Myrtle is about your head" (26). The crown may not be of laurel but like the laurel, the myrtle is evergreen and connotes immortality and eternity. In these instances, it is as if we witness different stages of a contest - beginning, middle, end.

Such readings, however, prove unsatisfactory. H.D. has carefully concealed the genders of both the implied "I" speaker and the "you," and prevented a discussion of either "him" or "her" throughout any explication. True, in part 1 the speaker refers to "your male torso" (14), and the term masculine applies to socially constructed qualities characteristic of human men, while the term male always seems to refer to the male sex. But to assume H.D. participates in what "always seems" to be the case is dangerous. In addition, according to Cassandra Laity, "[T] he deliberate artifice of the statue in association with the loved male body creates a transgressive sexual politics. Artifice enacts the necessary denaturalization of the normative erotic body, traditionally defined as female and natural" (67). In H.D.'s "The Contest," artifice is doubled, manifest in the imaging - the imagining, the conceiving - of the statue-like "you," as well as in the production - the composition, the fabrication - of the poem itself. Thus, the artifice of a "male torso" provides neither the evasion of subterfuge nor the enunciation of reality, but instead complicates notions of both. If the "you" is male, not identifying him as such has allowed H.D. to objectify the man the way the woman has been objectified - yet without overtly, directly challenging the stereotype. If the "you" is female, not identifying her as such has allowed H.D. to bring in the dimension of lesbianism. And of course, if we begin to consider the gender of the implied "I" speaker as male and not female - that is, if we separate the sex of the speaker from the sex of the poet - the way we separate their voices - then the possibilities and the complexities increase. Clearly this is not an example of H.D. both complying with and resisting stereotypes. Gender is a matter of uncertainty in "The Contest," and uncertainty does more than "jostle" a foundational cluster or invert a Petrarchan gaze. Uncertainty in H.D.'s poetry decenters both conventional definitions of gender and conventional hierarchizations of gender roles; and ultimately it shifts the paradigm for their analysis.

How can there be an object/subject exchange without a subject? How can there be a female/male binary without females and males? Perhaps H.D., by absenting a subject/I and fetishizing an object/you, analyzes and describes an alternative to oppositional paradigms; perhaps she analyzes and describes a fantasy where a subject, far from being fragmentated and fragmenting, doubles itself as both subject and object into a new subject-position. A fantasy of this type is described by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis:

In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign; he appears caught up in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned to any fixed place in it. . . . As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a dehumanized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question. (26)

"The Contest" becomes a fantasy of the Laplanche/Pontalis variation: H.D. does not merely pursue Sappho in this wooing process but becomes entangled with her, caught up in a sequence of images that blur not only what is human and what is landscape, but who is subject and who is object, what is a subject and what is an object.

Whatever the ambiguous genders of the implied speaker and the "you," the look - the gaze - is objectifying. At least in the beginning. The speaker focuses exclusively on the body of the "you." In part 1, the speaker's gaze narrows from the "stature" (1) and moves outward along the limbs to one "wrist" (5), then returns to the center, noticing "[t] he ridge of your breast" (8) and the shadows "under each" (9), following the line of
shadow to “the clenched muscles / of your slender hips” (10-11). Then the speaker’s gaze seems to widen again to appreciate from head to toe the halo-like light outlining “the circle of your cropped hair” (12), “your male torso” (14), and even “the foot-arch and the straight ankle” (15). The movement of the speaker’s eyes suggests a delicate eroticism reminiscent of Lo-fu’s careful analysis of the apple branch. But in part 2, the speaker ceases to only objectify the “you.” Now the speaker begins to metaphorize and metamorphosize the “you.” The use of metaphor and simile in Sappho, according to duBois, “calls attention to the fragmented status of the fragment, the thing being compared forever absent, available only to the imagination” (41). Here, H.D.’s imitation of a fragment creates the same kind of tension. While the speaker’s gaze still focuses on the body - “a great band clasps your forehead” (18) - it is a body that seems to be one with the “granite and ore in rocks” (17); “you have entered the hill-straits” (24). Not only “[y]ou are white,” but you are “a limb of cypress / bent under a weight of snow” (20-21). Whereas in part 1 the body of the “you” is depicted in concrete, or at least bodily, terms of tense musculature, here “your arms are fire” (23), an image as abstract as the word “splendid,” which is used to describe more of what “[y]ou are” (22).

In part 3 the metamorphosis continues to oscillate between creating a human and creating a landscape. The head, hair, breast, feet, knees, thighs, chin, throat, and shoulders of the “you” still fill the gaze of the implied “I,” but the pieces of the “you” blur with the surrounding landscape of the sea garden:

The narcissus has copied the arch of your slight breast: your feet are citron-flowers, your knees, cut from white-ash, your thighs are rock-cistus. (31-35)

Carson reminds us that, for the lover, “the moment of desire is one that defies proper edge, being a compound of opposites forced together at pressure” (30). For the object/beloved, though, this moment does not instigate the wild, emotional metamorphosis of a Daphne. The carefully constructed forms and rhythms of “The Contest,” mirroring the symmetry of a work of Greek sculpture, indicate that H.D. views the transformation as something creative and willed and controlled. And as a recuperation of what is continuous but has been unacknowledged. Recalling Freud’s discussion of the eye as the erogenous zone “most remote from the sexual object,” yet, “most frequently stimulated by the particular quality of excitation whose cause... we describe as beauty” we may view “The Contest” as an instance of H.D.’s wooing of Sappho - and of “you” more generally - as a subject woos an object. In this sense, the poem’s images of metamorphoses function for H.D. as sublimation; she transforms the sexual energy of looking to the artistic energy of creating. But this redirection itself changes the subject/object relation. There is no experience of fusion here, as in the case of Lo-fu and the apple branch, because the “you” is not an object/branch but a subject/human. The implied “I” speaker/subject cannot fuse with the “you”/subject; the two subjects can only engage in the erotics of fragmentation - the “you” fragmented by the speaker, and the speaker fragmented by her very absence.

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

- H.D., “Fragment Forty” (CP 174)

I have refused to label H.D.’s artistic construction of the Sapphic gaze an imitation. H.D. read and responded to translations of Sappho by men, but she herself did not translate the fragments. Gregory reminds us that for H.D. to assume the “role of translator and interpreter of ancient texts” was to assume “a place within a precinct universally imagined as male” (H.D. and Hellenism 38). In her relationships with Pound and (husband) Richard Aldington, H.D. had to consider not only how much knowledge of Greek to “display” to them, but how - and if? - to “display” it at all. “This question,” Gregory insists, “of H.D.’s specialized knowledge... is bound to the spirit of gentlemen’s competitive games, a model deeply implicated in the display of classical learning” (54). A “contest,” indeed! With Aldington (54), H.D. shared a “literary hellenism” (139); and with him she edited and contributed to the Poets’ Translation Series (1915-16 and 1918-19). Aldington’s translations of Anyte comprised Number 1 and H.D.’s translations of Euripides’s Iphigenia in Aulis comprised Number 3 (1916). Later, H.D. provided Number 2 of the 1918-19 series, a translation of Euripides’s Hippolytus, which Aldington called “an improvement on the Iphigenia” (Letter 72, 173), but which (he said) required “a few minor corrections of punctuation, spelling & grammar, chiefly to preserve you from the fools who will see that & nothing else” (172). According to Caroline Zilboorg, H.D. “understood both the essential justice and the kind impulse behind Aldington’s response to her compositions” (173), and Aldington surely did admire H.D.’s ability; after all, he named her Greek editor in his “Scheme” for the second Poets’ Translation Series (Letter 70, 185).

But even if we acknowledge that H.D. “understood” Aldington’s overall critique, we should embrace with some caution an assumption that such understanding implies H.D.’s agreement with or acquiescence to each particular criticism. In fact, H.D.’s commitment to translation extends beyond “corrections of punctuation, spelling & grammar.” She saw translation as a means of bringing new life to ancient texts, extending rather than fixing meaning. As she says of her protagonist Julia in Bid Me to Live, “Anyone can translate the meaning of the word. She wanted the shape, the feel of it, the character of it, as if it had been freshly minted” (163). In her 1937
Certainly, then, H.D. developed her own criteria of what constituted "translation." That she was fully capable of translating Sappho is evident. But while an Aldington translation of Sappho, "To Atthis," was published in 1914, H.D. significantly refrained from translating the one poet she found capable of creating "a world of emotion, differing entirely from any present day imaginable world of emotion," a world beyond the "reach" and "song" of even "the greatest of her own countrymen" ("Wise Sappho" 58). H.D. did not translate - imitate - Sappho because Sappho, with "a craft never surpassed in literature" (63) was inimitable. And while H.D. may have been eager to re-create the works of Euripides - a man - she may have been less inclined to tamper with and second-guess the fragments of Sappho - the woman. To paraphrase Sydney Janet Kaplan, H.D.'s translations of Euripides may have their "roots in suffering and anger" as she reflects upon "the diverse ways women have been oppressed"; but her "impetus" for Sappho "is passion and identification" (37-38).

And yet, how do we account for H.D.'s frequent allusion to Sappho? Is this - the relationship between H.D. and Sappho - the "real" contest? Rather than second-guessing Sappho through imitation, H.D. finds another means of recuperating "wholes" from fragments. As Gregory rightfully insists, it is "upon Sappho's endurance as the image of woman/poet/lover" that H.D.'s own somehow depends ("Rose Cut in Rock" 535). H.D. writes:

Sappho has become for us a name, an abstraction as well as a pseudonym for poignant human feelings, she is indeed rocks set in a blue sea, she is the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken. She is the island of artistic perfection where the lover of ancient beauty (shipwrecked in the modern world) may yet find foothold and take breath and gain courage for new adventures and dream of yet unexplored continents and realms of future artistic achievement. She is the wise Sappho. (67)

H.D. - Hilda Doolittle - takes a pseudonym of her own because, like Sappho, she does not want her artistry to represent "poignant human feelings" but to embody - to be - such feelings. And she assumes the Sapphic gaze not to duplicate Sappho's "artistic perfection" but to "find foothold" for her own "artistic achievement." H.D.'s are not acts of imitation but of emulation. Emulation suggests competition, even rivalry, and an eventual contest - which ultimately becomes "the contest," the ideal competition where the struggle is between equals, between two subjects, and results in victory and for both. Emulation suggests that H.D. for-loving Sappho above all artists, desires to equal her predecessor's poetic power by attempting to make whole for herself that which has come to her in shattered pieces. The erotic fragments in Sappho's archives allow H.D. to (re)construct subjectivity independent of subject/object, female/male binarisms. Sappho's fragments, like the branch in Lo-fu's orchard, not only engage H.D. in a contest, but also serve for her as a means of attaining artistic happiness, as a means of completing herself as woman/poet/lover - muse/goddess/woman - and as a means of approach to ecstasy.

NOTES

1 David Robinson's early Sappho and Her Influence is a delightful introduction to allusions and praise. Lawrence Lipking's "Sappho Descending" emphasizes the "battle over Sappho's name" (43) between both women and men poets:

Female poets required a model for their art and sex, conclusive evidence of a woman's perfect genius. And men [male poets] required an example of the hazards into which women plunge when they aspire to write - abandonment, shame, and even death await them. (42)

Susan Brown, in "A Victorian Sappho," argues that women poets "enact a poetic agency that recalls recent feminist theoretical attempts to articulate viable alternatives to an identity politics" whenever women poets relate to "the figure of Sappho" (208).

2 Gregory has recently extended her readings of H.D. and Sappho, and insists that "[f]or H.D. a direct female transmission from Sappho is highly problematic" (H.D. and Hellenism 58). She adds: "Within H.D.'s intricate Sapphic intertextuality, one may distinguish between an overt and a covert interplay" (151).

3 In Visual and Other Pleasures, Mulvey revises some of her original assertions in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

4 I am indebted here to Rachel Blau DuPlessis's nuanced distinctions between archetype and prototype in "The Critique of Consciousness and Myth," where she
available to H.D. in the high modernist discourse of the 1920s. Swinburne's hymns to
[Swinburne's poems] articulate a spectrum of desires and gender disruptions not
Siecle. In a discussion of H.D.'s Paint It Today, Laity argues:
work of Swinburne, see Cassandra Laity's insightful H.D. and the Victorian Fin de
10 Swinburne is a repeated source of inspiration for H.D. This is exemplified in Bid Me
Compare this citation to H.D.'s "The Wise Sappho" (57-58).
9 Gubar quotes H.D.'s "Notes on Sappho" from an unpublished 1920 manuscript (54).
8 I do not speculate on the gender of the speaker or that of the "you" - not because
mean that they have not used it" (34). In Sappho (and La Fayette), DeJean says,
That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
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That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him

"A prototype is not a binding, timeless pattern, but one critically open to the
possibility, even the necessity, of its own transformation" (299).

5 Joel Fineman emphasizes not the originality of Renaissance imaging but rather its
reliance upon "the regular force of visual imagery in the tradition of the literature or
poetry of praise - a tradition that goes back to the praise of love in the Symposium or
Phaedrus" (62).

6 In an examination of Sappho (and the seventeenth-century French novelist La
Fayette), Joan DeJean argues against Luce Irigaray's "categorical denunciation of an
erotic economy..." dominated by the [male] gaze," a denunciation that DeJean believes
to be Irigaray's explicit "attack" on Rene Girard's triangulation of desire - where
"desire is never original," says DeJean, "but is inspired by the desire of a male rival," and
where "the desiring subject is always a man or a woman... created by a man"
(34). It is Girard's claim - recognizing attraction in rivalry - that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick
develops in Between Men (21-25) and that DuPlessis refers to in her discussion of the
foundational cluster above; in Eros the Bittersweet, Anne Carson convincingly argues
that there are "more ways... to triangulate desire" than merely "[the ruse of inserting a
rival between lover and beloved]" (18). DeJean suggests that Irigaray misses an
important point in her "reformulation of the language of desire" because Irigaray fails
to acknowledge that "[the gaze has been forbidden to women, but that does not mean
that they have not used it]" (34). In Sappho (and La Fayette), DeJean says,
"Woman" is depicted as "openly speaking her desire through the eyes," a desire that
"expresses itself voyeuristically, through a gaze that is mediated, although in ways
that are not recognizable on the basis of male-oriented discussions of the
triangulation of desire" (35). DeJean acknowledges that Sappho's gaze "may well
predate the stereotypes" that a woman can only usurp, "for her female narrator," the
gaze attributed to - and demanded by? - men (38). She concludes we are
accustomed to deciphering only the male gaze. As soon as we begin to believe that
women, writers at least, rather than merely avoiding a visual erotic economy, on
occasion assume control over the gaze, we may well assemble information necessary
to overturn Irigaray's axiom" (45).

7 The numbering of Sappho's fragments can be a source of great confusion for
Sappho and H.D. scholars, since there were at least three conflicting numbering
systems by 1925. In that year, Marion Mills Miller and David Moore Robinson
published The Songs of Sappho. John Maxwell Edmonds had published his
translations in Lyra Graeca in 1922, while the 1885 translations by Henry Thornton
Wharton were still widely read and greatly admired. Fragment 31 is so named based on the (re)writings of Catullus some 600 years after Sappho's death, but in both the
Wharton and Edmonds texts it is listed as fragment 2. From the titles of H.D.'s five
"fragments" - 36, 40, 41, 68, 113 - and their Sapphic epigraphs, it is clear that H.D.
used the Wharton editions (five editions appeared between 1885 and 1907), editions
that she mentions briefly in her review of Edwin Marion Cox ("Winter Roses" 596).

I use the recent Powell translation because he attempts to "preserve Sappho's
rhythms" (40) and her "Aeolic measures [that] transfer into English with remarkable
felicity" (41); his attention to rhythms and measures is important to my argument
about H.D.'s syntax and diction. The Wharton translation is prose, not verse. Since I
do not claim that fragment 31/2 is the basis for "The Contest" but only that it
exemplifies for H.D. the origins of a Sapphic way of "seeing," I feel this substitution of
Powell for Wharton is warranted. However, I provide the Wharton translation that H.D.
would have read:

That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
thy sweet speech and lovely laughter; that indeed makes my heart flutter in my
bosom. For when I see thee but a little, I have no utterance left, my tongue is broken
down, and straightway a subtle fire has run under my skin, with my eyes I have no
sight, my ears ring, sweat bathes me, and a trembling seizes all my body; I am paler
than grass, and seem in my madness little better than one dead. But I must dare all,
since one so poor...

That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him
thy sweet speech and lovely laughter; that indeed makes my heart flutter in my
bosom. For when I see thee but a little, I have no utterance left, my tongue is broken
down, and straightway a subtle fire has run under my skin, with my eyes I have no
sight, my ears ring, sweat bathes me, and a trembling seizes all my body; I am paler
than grass, and seem in my madness little better than one dead. But I must dare all,
since one so poor...

8 I do not speculate on the gender of the speaker or that of the "you" - not because
the gender of either or both is unimportant but because my speculation might make it
seem so. For now, I am concerned with what is historically available to us - the
gender of the poet. And it is the poet, after all, who breathes artistry and ideology into
the gaze and the poem. Gender speculation returns in my discussion of "The Contest"
below.

9 Gubar quotes H.D.'s "Notes on Sappho" from an unpublished 1920 manuscript (54).
Compare this citation to H.D.'s "The Wise Sappho" (57-58).

10 Swinburne is a repeated source of inspiration for H.D. This is exemplified in Bid Me
to Live (DuPlessis Career 65), HERmione (Friedman, Psyche 43), and Asphodel
(Friedman, Penelope 203). For an in-depth examination of H.D.'s relationship to the
work of Swinburne, see Cassandra Laity's insightful H.D. and the Victorian Fin de
Siecle. In a discussion of H.D.'s Paint It Today, Laity argues:

[Swinburne's poems] articulate a spectrum of desires and gender disruptions not
available to H.D. in the high modernist discourse of the 1920s. Swinburne's hymns to
the Sapphic femme fatale or the male androgyne offered to H.D. and other women writers the example of an open sexual narrative, while simultaneously maintaining the fiction of a rebel "author" whose unruly psychosexuality comprises the various songs of his deviant persona. (34)

11 Because I am indebted to duBois, I feel obligated to point out that she does not necessarily share the views of fragmentation and wholeness that I attribute to H.D. DuBois says that Sappho's "poetry can produce anxiety because it exemplifies lack, and Sappho herself sometimes becomes a fetish object, made whole, perfect, sealed on the page by translators who are made uncomfortable by the holes in her writing" (27). I am suggesting that H.D. escapes "anxiety" in reading Sappho, or that she experiences no discomfort in "the holes." But I do not share duBois's view that H.D. "engages with the past in order to generate some vision of historical difference" (75).

12 Both Thomas Burnett Swann and Eileen Gregory offer brief commentaries on "The Contest." Swann classifies it as one of H.D.'s poems about "mortal heroes" who are "free from the taints of human intercourse" (92). He reads it as a celebration of "unnamed athletes" who are "poised to begin a game" and "seem not so much living men as statues by Myron or Polycleitus" (97-98). Swann suggests that H.D. "subordinates the human element to nature," that she depicts "men in terms of natural objects and sometimes los[s]sight of the men's humanity" in her attempt to describe "three heroes whose hard perfection excludes human frailties, who can commit no treacheries and bring no disillusionment to the women who may love them" (98). Gregory sees "The Contest" as an imaging of a single "human athlete" who "is humanly crafted. As image, the male figure is highly liminal; his aspects of grace and power, as experienced by the poet, reside between nature and human artifice" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 545). I agree that H.D. consciously seeks such connotations, but add that neither of these readings addresses the instability created by the poem's conflicting form and content.

13 Here I am not suggesting that H.D.'s "classicism" is necessarily Sapphic, lesbian, or Greek. What is "classical" about the forms of H.D.'s Sea Garden poems is, perhaps, "neo-classical." In their ordered design and in their very articulation of what is "classical" or "symmetry, balance - the forms of the poems seem to react to the limitations, dualisms, and imperfections of the modern world in much the same way as the neoclassical poems of Pope reacted to the seemingly unbridled enthusiasm of the Renaissance. I reiterate here the absence of Renaissance, and therefore Petrarchan (as well as Romantic/Keatsian), ideals of artistry in H.D.'s Sea Garden poems.

14 What Highet calls a tricolon we may today call a palilogy, the deliberate repetition of words and grammatical presentations, a sort of parallelism in threes.

15 We have already explored the significance of three as it is implicated in the triangulation of desire. Deborah Kelly Kloepfer discusses H.D.'s "trilogies" and "triptychs" and how they function differently as "structural strategies" (187) in the poetry, such as Trilogy and Helen in Egypt, and the prose, such as Palimpsest. We should also recall that at the beginning of the above discussion of "Notes on Thought and Vision" and "The Wise Sappho," I pointed out that H.D. divides the self into three "states or manifestations" and merges the three names "of muse and goddess and of human woman."

16 I am influenced here by Lee Edelman, although I do not suggest that H.D. employs chiasmus for the same reasons or to the same effects as Hart Crane. Discussing the ways in which Crane utilizes chiasmus, anacoluthon, and catachresis in "Voyages," Edelman finds that in Crane's poetics, "every [rhetorical] movement toward the stability of chiasmus carries a trace of the break that figures the violence of anacoluthon" (256), and such instability in language is mirrored in Crane's images: "emblems of balance and antithesis are ceaselessly created and destroyed, drowned and reborn" (263) in instances of "catachrestic borrowing[s]" (284), "catachrestic designation[s]" (285), and "catachrestic ploys" (287). Edelman reads Crane as ultimately attempting "to avoid betrayal by figural language" (290) by embracing "negativity" as "a means of stability" (291). Of repetition, Gertrude Stein writes:

[!]Insistence . . . in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is always alive it is never carrying anything in the same way because emphasis can never be the same not even when it is most the same that is when it has been taught. (171)

18 Moreover, as DeJean argues, Sappho uses the present tense so that "[s] he appears to be grounding her gaze in the instant of its generation as if to invite comparison with the focus of male erotic poetry," as well as to stage "the gaze as an act of memorialization" (39). For DeJean, "In Sappho's erotic vision, the gaze does not function as a unique occurrence," but is, instead, "doubly repetitive, both an action that takes place again and again and an original that is recreated in memory" (40). While I admire the articulation of the present tense, the idea that Sappho counters a monolithic male gaze with her own seems to align DeJean's argument, at least here, with Vickers and DuPlessis rather than with duBois.

19 H.D.'s translations of Euripides (versus her interpretations of him?) are explored
insightfully by Eileen Gregory (H.D. and Hellenism 179-231). For a brief but insightful discussion of the dangers of both over- and undertranslation, see Diane J. Rayor’s “Translating Fragments,” which refers specifically to Sappho and incidentally to H.D.

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