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# Repression, Renewal and 'The Race of Women' in H.D.'s *Ion*

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## CHAPTER 6

### REPRESSION, RENEWAL AND 'THE RACE OF WOMEN' IN H.D.'S *ION*

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Steven Yao has called H.D.'s *Ion* her 'most ambitious feat of translation' (2002a: 83). Two contexts are relevant for thinking about H.D.'s work on this project. One is psychoanalysis, and the other is the scholarship which interprets myth as a narrative reflection of ritual practice. Both contexts are significantly tied to H.D.'s personal life and writing career. Matte Robinson even claims that one of the major characters in the play, Kreousa, 'becomes an extension of H.D.' (2013: 270). This claim may be overstated, but Kreousa's quest for recognition from Apollo does resemble H.D.'s effort to supply her daughter, Perdita, with a patronym in order to secure the girl's legal standing. Richard Aldington refused to allow H.D. to register him as Perdita's father, though she did so anyway (Robinson 1982: 179–80; Guest 1984: 111). Aldington did not publicly contest H.D.'s action, even when he sought a divorce from H.D. in 1937, the year she published her translation of the *Ion* (Zilboorg 2003: 239–40). However, H.D. told Ezra Pound that he did threaten 'to use Perdita to divorce me and to have me locked up if I registered her as legitimate' (Friedman 2002: 466). This threat was the source of anxiety for H.D. and it kept her and her daughter in a precarious legal position until Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson legally adopted Perdita in 1928 (Friedman 2002: 467).

While the play is obviously not an allegory about H.D.'s personal life, her translation evidently led her to consider features of its plot in relation to her experience as a single mother. On 25 August 1935, H.D. reported to Bryher that she had completed her version of the *Ion*, recalling that 'this was work I was doing after the first confinement and during my pregnancy with old Pups [Perdita]' (Friedman 2002: 203). H.D.'s translation emphasizes Kreousa's quest for Apollo's acknowledgement, since the god impregnated her without publicly admitting he did so. H.D. sought the kind of legitimation for her daughter that Apollo confers on *Ion* when Athena confirms that *Ion* is the god's son. Although the seven years between Perdita's adoption and H.D.'s publication of the *Ion* should lead one to be wary about oversimplifying the relationship between the play and H.D.'s experience, H.D. often returned to earlier moments in her life, and such retrospective ruminations frequently inform her work. At the same time, the *way* in which she treats this material reflects a feminist theory of translation as a mode of transformation. As Barbara Godard explains, 'Feminist discourse works upon language, upon dominant discourse, in a radical interrogation of meaning.' According to this view, 'translation [...] is production, not reproduction' (1990: 90). In both her verse renderings and her prose interpolations, H.D. 'works upon the language' of Euripides' play, producing something new in an English text that reflects her concerns as a twentieth-century woman.

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As Susan Stanford Friedman explains, ‘it was the completion of Euripides’ *Ion* in August of 1935 that represented the immediate capstone of H.D.’s Vienna Experience’ when she was psychoanalysed by Freud for the last time (2002: 51). Nonetheless, while H.D. pays homage to Freud in her memoir about their sessions together (in *Tribute to Freud*), she also registers her disagreement with him (H.D. [1956] 1974: 110, 119). According to Eileen Gregory, H.D.’s translation of the *Ion* reflects her personal reshaping of her own sense of identity, particularly in terms of a shift from crystalline imagism (embodied by *Ion*) to a more assertive poetics based on the figure of the woman-mother-as-poet (1997: 213).<sup>2</sup> Robert Duncan views the *Ion* as ‘the pivot’ in her career (2011: 210), and Patricia Moyer concludes that H.D.’s prose characterization of Kreousa ‘signals an expansion of H.D.’s long fascination with female figures in relation to her own life in the wider context of the twentieth century’ (1997: 111). Moreover, by publishing her version of Euripides’ play, H.D. publicly associated herself with a mythic text that could complement, if not quite rival, Freud’s Oedipus myth.

For these reasons, instead of interpreting H.D.’s translation in primarily biographical terms, I focus more broadly on the cathartic effect of the mutual recognition scene in *Ion* as well as the role of the Arrephoria as a feminine rite of passage encoded in the play. (Kreousa’s story echoes that of the Arrephoroi, three sisters entrusted with a basket bearing an infant.) In particular, I show that enclosed baskets and the cave where Apollo rapes Kreousa and where Kreousa gives birth to *Ion* resemble symbols of metamorphosis (in the form of boxes enclosing cocoons) that H.D. reprises and develops in such texts as *Trilogy* and *Tribute to Freud*. I also examine the parallel between the burnt but blooming olive tree in one of the late prose comments of H.D.’s *Ion* and the image of the flowering rod in *Trilogy*. In each case, H.D. artfully synthesizes the materials of Greek mythology, literature and religion to achieve a sense of personal triumph that is also a cultural triumph. Kreousa’s attempt to bring her experience into words while seeking redress for her mistreatment represents the experience of many women, not just her own. H.D. calls attention to this fact by using the phrase ‘the race of women’ twice in her translation. While the Greek phrase γένος γυναικῶν (*génos gunaikōn*), does not appear in the original text of Euripides’ play, it does play a significant role in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and the concept is important throughout ancient Greek culture. Moreover, in the original text of the *Ion* Kreousa generalizes her complaint at 252f. (ὦ τλήμονες γυναικες/ὦ τολμήματα/θεῶν [*ō tlēmōnes gunaikes/ō tolmēmata theōn*]), before speaking specifically against Apollo and about herself at 384ff., where H.D. mentions the ‘race of women’ a second time.<sup>3</sup>

### Speech and repression

H.D. closely follows Euripides by emphasizing the centrality of speech and secrets throughout *Ion* (Zeitlin 1996: 306–7).<sup>4</sup> Secrets are also fundamental to the plots of the *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, two other plays by Euripides which H.D. adapted or partially translated. For example, in *Hippolytus* the Chorus mentions that Phaedra suffers

from κρυπτῷ πένθει (Eur. *Hipp.* 139), which H.D. translates as 'secret hurt' (1983: 86). In *Iphigenia*, Agamemnon arranges to have Clytemnestra bring their daughter to Aulis to be sacrificed under the pretext that she is to be married to Achilles. Whereas the central conflict of *Ion* is resolved and harmony ultimately achieved, the disclosure of secrets in *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia* do not result in reconciliation. Instead, revelations intensify conflicts. When principal characters such as Agamemnon, Menelaus and Theseus speak in *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Hippolytus*, they frequently do so to promote political designs or convey their own personal concerns, even to the detriment of social or kinship ties. Although there is an important rapprochement between Artemis and Hippolytus in the last act of *Hippolytus Temporizes*, Hippolytus and Phaedra both die after their secret tryst (H.D. 2003: 98–9).

In *Ion*, speaking is often performative (as when Hermes ritually identifies Ion at the end of the Prologue, or when Apollo designates Xouthos as Ion's father). In contrast to H.D.'s treatments of situations in the other two plays by Euripides, speaking is also the means by which the burden of the main character's secret past is lifted. The conflict between speech and repression parallels the conflict between Kreousa's quest for justice and Apollo's assertion of divine authority. The first conflict resolves when Kreousa and Ion recognize their true relation to one another through Apollo's indirect intervention. H.D. characterizes this event as a form of renewal by connecting it to the imagery of the budding olive tree in a key prose passage she includes in her translation. The image of a burnt but budding tree is important to the play and to its classical historical context, after Athens is besieged by Persian conquerors, but it also appears in *Trilogy*, her epic poem of World War II. She turns the image into a palimpsest, a symbol of hope that unites various moments in time. This palimpsest may be regarded as H.D.'s version of the 'mythic method' T.S. Eliot describes in his discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1975: 177).

A mythic context also contributes to the theme of secrecy. At one point in the play, the Choros refers to a dance of 'three sisters' on 'the rock of Makra', associated with the god Pan (H.D. 2003: 189). Peter Burian explains that this passage refers to the daughters of Kekrops and Aglauros (Kreousa's ancestors), and he mentions the festival that commemorates their experience, sometimes called the Arrephoria (Euripides 1996: 90). The name of this festival refers to the bearing of secret or 'unnamed' items by participants (Harrison [1908] 1975: 122). The first part of the word may come from τὰ ἄρηρα (*ta arrēta*), literally meaning 'unspoken things,' connoting things 'secret' or 'shameful to be spoken.' In the context of mystery rites, Walter Burkert argues that the term should be translated as 'unsayable' ([1962] 1972: 461). The festival of the Arrephoria is linked to the violation of a taboo: the daughters of Aglauros look in a basket entrusted to them, in which they discover the infant Erichthonios and are punished for their disobedience (H.D. refers to Erichthonios as Erechtheus throughout her translation, conflating two of Kreousa's ancestors). Since this passage refers to an event that occurs in the same place where Apollo had sex with Kreousa and where Kreousa abandoned her baby (H.D. 2003: 215–16), secrets become linked with repression, ritual and speech in a powerful but contradictory way that puts Kreousa's anger about the god's injustice in the context of her family's history and the natural cycle of seasons (Goff 1995: 363). H.D.'s translation

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calls attention to the psychoanalytic links between repression, symptom, speech and healing. Her phrasal repetitions correspond at the level of style to Kreousa's angry outbursts against Apollo at the level of plot.

The play's repetitions of the story of Apollo's rape and abandonment of Kreousa provide an opportunity for expressing her sense of injustice and confronting its traumatic effects so as to overcome them. This pattern of development echoes Freud's ideas about trauma, repression and repetition ([1914] 1950: 145–57).<sup>5</sup> However, since the father of Ion is a god, Kreousa must capitulate to the god's solution and learn to live with it. As H.D. puts it in a different context, 'It is terrible to be a virgin because a Virgin has a baby with God' (1998: 115). Although H.D. emphasizes Athena as the epitome of rationality overcoming the destructive effects of passion, Kreousa's eventual acceptance of Apollo's treatment of her seems to exemplify her pragmatic accommodation to 'the reality principle' as much as her recovery from the trauma that produces her symptoms of despair and rage (Freud [1920] 1960: 7). While this may strike modern readers as contradictory, it is nonetheless true that Euripides devotes much of his plot to the psychological process by which Kreousa comes to understand herself, her son and Apollo's treatment of her. In her adaptation, H.D. focuses on this process and retains the pattern of Euripides' plot, which binds Kreousa and Ion by dramatizing their parallel quests for knowledge and recognition. Ion's maturation is profoundly connected to his need for his mother,<sup>6</sup> while Kreousa's need to be acknowledged by Apollo is just as firmly tied to her discovery that Ion is her son. H.D. emphasizes the mutuality of their quests by calling attention to corresponding episodes of speech and silence throughout her translation.

To give one example, H.D. uses chiasmus to emphasize the separation of mother and child as well as their reunion. In the prologue, Hermes announces that

Phoibos loved Kreousa:  
daughter of Erechtheus, on the Acropolis:  
masters of Atthis call the place Makra:  
that Athenian cliff, great-rocks:  
the god kept her father ignorant:  
she bore her secret, month by month:  
in secret, she brought forth:

*H.D. [1927] 2003: 151–2*

H.D. underscores the secrecy of Kreousa's pregnancy and delivery through the chiasmus in the last two lines. This syntactic pattern is her own; it does not echo the original Greek. The pattern also plays on the meaning of 'bear' as enduring a burden or hardship and as giving birth. The secret is her pregnancy, which she both endures and successfully brings to term. In syntax and wordplay, H.D.'s style reflects a feminist practice of translation as 'production' rather than mere 'reproduction' (Godard 1990: 90). In this passage and in a key speech by Kreousa ([1927] 2003: 209), H.D.'s chiasmus amounts to a verbal form of weaving that parallels the plaiting of Ion's baby basket and that of Kreousa's ancestor,

Erichthonios/Erechtheus.<sup>7</sup> As Haun Saussy observes, 'chiasmus selects and binds (*chiasmus* is also the Greek term for a kind of butterfly bandage)' (235).

H.D. emphasizes the theme of secrecy by repeating it in parallel but mirror-reversed terms. In the first part of the phrasal pair ('she bore her secret'), she presents secrecy as a burden, but in the second phrase ('In secret she brought forth'), she puns on 'bore' as 'give birth', which makes the relation between the phrases more than parallel, since the second phrase marks a change or culmination – the transition from gestation and the pain of one form of secrecy to the birth of Ion and the pain of Kreousa's public shame for being an unwed mother. However, the birth is also a completion, as we learn later in the play, when Kreousa recognizes and reunites with her son and thereby extends her lineage. In the stylistic texture of H.D.'s translation, as in the plot of the text, the cradle becomes an abiding sign of reunion and renewal.

Moreover, because the basket used as Ion's cradle plays such a critical role in the recognition plot, the play may be regarded as a contest over control of the womb. Explicit references to the cradle as a woven basket, or 'hollow' (κύτος [*kútos*]), make the basket a double for the womb, for the verb κύω [*kúō*] can mean 'conceive' (Loraux 1993: 204). Without Apollo's intervention, mother and son cannot be reunited because only Apollo, Hermes and the audience know that Ion is Kreousa's son at the outset of the play. To guarantee the legitimacy of the royal Athenian line, Apollo must admit his paternity to Ion, not just to Kreousa. In the cultural logic of the play, Kreousa's role as bearer is subordinate to the god's status as impregnator. This contest for control is also reflected in the myth of the Arrephoroi, since the girls who look for the baby inside the basket are punished for doing so.

Scholars have noted the similarities between the *Ion* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, both of which are about foundlings. According to Charles Segal,

The *Ion* re-envisages the action of the *Oedipus* through the eyes of Jocasta and in so doing fully develops the affective bond between mother and child that is barely hinted at in the *Oedipus* [. . .] The perspective of the *Ion* is [. . .] almost the reverse of that of the *Oedipus*, for there the relation between fathers and sons is particularly prominent, whereas the *Ion* scants the father-son relation in favor of that between mother and son.

1999: 101

Segal's insight that the *Ion* rewrites *Oedipus* can serve as a basis for assessing H.D.'s accomplishment in rendering the play into English, for her emphasis on the mother-child dyad is not only true to the original but a means of challenging the normativity of patriarchal models of selfhood and social arrangements. In the *Ion* Euripides reveals that the father is a legal fiction when he portrays Apollo as giving his son Ion to Xouthos as his heir. H.D. emphasizes the secondary status of Xouthos with respect to Kreousa in the prose interlude of section V of her translation, which acknowledges his importance but portrays Kreousa as spiritually superior. In H.D.'s account of their marriage, Kreousa 'has lived only half a life with him' (2003: 182). In passages such as

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this, H.D. makes the world of the play her own, offering more than a slavish recapitulation of Euripides.

Moreover, by focusing on a play that recasts the storyline of Oedipus, H.D.'s rendering of the *Ion* may be regarded as a significant reply, if not quite a rejoinder, to Freud. While Euripides' *Ion* may not be as famous or influential as Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as a work of classical drama it has a degree of cultural prestige. In addition, while H.D.'s tribute to Freud is genuine, it is not monolithic. As Duncan observes, 'The Oedipus complex itself does not preoccupy H.D.' (2011: 376). Instead, she concentrates on the pathos of the mother-child dyad and the jubilant reunion of Ion and Kreousa after years of separation and mutual attempts at violence. This dynamic seems to correspond with Freud's claim during analysis that H.D. was seeking union with her mother, as she reports in *Tribute to Freud*. According to Thomas Jenkins, H.D. intensifies the dramatic exchanges between Kreousa and Ion while decreasing the impact of the father-son dialogue between Xouthos and Ion (2007: 137). H.D. sent Freud a copy of her translation, and in his letter thanking her for the gift he suggests that he and H.D. were in agreement about the need for conscious reason to reckon with and control the unconscious in a healthy way (H.D. [1956] 1974: 194). In the *Ion*, the symbol for rationality is Athena, the deus ex machina who resolves Ion's lingering questions about the identity of his father, and H.D. explicitly hails her as the goddess of reason in one of her prose interpolations, a gesture that parallels her description in *Tribute to Freud* of an Athena figure that Freud owned (H.D. [1956] 1974: 124).

Kreousa's need to be recognized as the bearer of a child fathered by Apollo drives the plot of the play. The site of both Apollo's rape and Kreousa's abandonment of Ion is a cave, which is not only a symbol of the chthonic origins of the House of Kekrops but also of feminine fertility. Kreousa is the birth mother of Ion, but Apollo must arrange for the reunion of mother and son, and his authority in designating Xouthos as Ion's adoptive father provides the guarantee of a paternal name, a guarantee necessary for Ion's legitimate participation in Athenian society. According to Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, 'The myth of autochthony [at the heart of the play and of Athenian culture] excludes the human female from the ideal of reproduction yet retains the earth, a privileged metaphor for a female body' (1993: 193).

As Apollo's representative, Hermes is authorized to open the cradle containing the infant Ion so that the Pythian will find him and raise him in the temple. In the prologue, he refers to his brother Apollo with an epithet that may mean 'slanting' or 'oblique', declaring,

I obeyed my brother, Loxias:  
I found the reed-basket:  
I left the child there, on these steps:  
I opened the basket, revealed the contents:

H.D. [1927] 2003: 152

H.D. conveys the god's authority through balanced and forceful anaphora, a pattern of lineation that is distinct from that of the Greek original at lines 36–40. By contrast with

Hermes, the daughters of Kekrops and Aglauros are prohibited by Athena from looking in the basket containing Erichthonios and die after they violate the taboo. For her part, Kreousa feels constrained by her shame to put her secret into the basket, to hide the baby there. Her action is the opposite of Hermes's and conforms with cultural codes that reinforce men's power over procreation. In the passage above, H.D. renders the Greek phrase πλεκτὸν κύτος (*plektòn kútos*) as 'reed-basket' (*plektòn* means 'woven').

Moreover, H.D. parallels the basket that contains Ion's birth-tokens in the box-and-butterfly symbolism of such later publications as *Tribute to Freud* and *Trilogy*, thereby echoing and building upon the pattern of death and resurrection in the recognition plot of *Ion*. The basket was buried with Ion yet it is also the sign and means of his rebirth, since the tokens enclosed in the basket provide the basis for Kreousa's recognition of her son. H.D. provides striking parallels to the cradle-basket symbolism of *Ion* in the 'little boxes conditioned // to hatch butterflies' she describes in *Trilogy* (1998: 53) and in the cocoons that she remembers putting in a box as a child in *Tribute to Freud* (1974: 126–8).

When she broaches the subject with Ion regarding the prophecy she seeks from Apollo, Kreousa hedges and invents the story of a friend who was raped by the god. In the process of explaining this, both characters suppress their speech. Kreousa does so through inhibition, while Ion does so through prohibition:

Kreousa: – I dare not speak –  
 Ion: – speak and tell me –  
 Kreousa: – she was Phoibos' –  
 Ion: – do not say that –

H.D. [1927] 2003: 177

Ion repeats his prohibition in forthright terms a little later, reasserting his authority when he admonishes Kreousa to refrain from offending Apollo, saying, 'provoke not / unwilling utterance' (H.D. [1927] 2003: 180). These two forms of verbal suppression are informed by the gender codes of the period. As Adele Scafuro points out, Kreousa's shame is shared by 'other tragic heroines before they embark on narratives of sexual exploitation at the hands of gods' (1990: 140). Kreousa curbs her feelings and her articulation of them in order to comply with Ion's demand that she respect the god by keeping quiet. In effect, Kreousa's passive silence undergirds Ion's commanding masculinity. H.D.'s rendering of their stichomythia calls attention to this dependency through the brevity of her lines and the repetition of *speak* and *say*.

Kreousa tells her story again but in more forthright terms to an old family servant. As I have mentioned, his progressive expression of her story is like Freud's process of working through memories of traumatic events in order to avoid reliving them. Kreousa's second account reflects the conflict between her desire to tell her story and her shame about making it known, but this time she is more assertive about articulating it because now she believes she has lost all hope of recovering her son or of having another child (she has just learned that Apollo has given Ion to Xouthos as his son).

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Soul,  
soul,  
speak,  
nay, soul, O, my soul,  
be silent, how can you name an act  
of shame,  
an illicit act?  
soul,  
soul,  
be silent,  
nay, nay, O, my soul,  
speak;  
what can stop you,  
what can prevent?

H.D. [1927] 2003: 209

Echoing the syntactic pattern of the passage from Hermes' prologue I quoted earlier, H.D. uses chiasmus as a counterpoint to Kreousa's repetitions in this speech (soul, / speak / ... soul, / be silent: soul, / / be silent / ... soul, / speak). The contrasts of the chiasmus reflect Kreousa's turmoil, but the repetitions reflect the urgency of what she has to say and her need to tell it. While the lines have the syntactic form of chiasmus, meaning repeats in the first and last lines as well as the second and third lines, so that they function as a form of parallelism. Within the parallel, however, is the basic conflict between remaining silent and speaking out. That antithesis is fundamental to Kreousa's character, so H.D.'s use of chiasmus is not merely a piece of ceremonious formalism but an organic expression of her protagonist's turmoil, especially in relation to others – the old servant, in this scene, but Ion in others. Kreousa's capacity to tell her story is a turning point in the play, but it is not an easy or unequivocal success. In her speech Kreousa finally expresses her feelings about what has happened to her in an overt and assertive way. Her anger about Apollo's injustice against her takes the form of the plot to kill Ion, but the god ultimately foils that attempt in order to effect the mutual recognition of mother and son.

When Kreousa and Ion finally recognize each other, the play enacts a ritualized rebirth of Ion. The sentence patterns that H.D. devises to signal this ritual may be regarded as the figurative or linguistic equivalent to the plaited strands of wicker comprising Ion's cradle: Euripides characterizes it not only as *plékton* but also as *ἑλικτόν* (*hēlikτόν*), a semantically similar word meaning 'rolled, twisted, or weaved'. With the mutual recognition of mother and son, what was formerly secret finally comes to light. This results in psychological healing for both. Like the chiasmus in Hermes' speech about Kreousa's secret pregnancy and delivery, Kreousa's chiasmic expression of her inner conflict when she finally tells her story openly forms a kind of syntactical weave that rounds out the contours of the play. As a result, H.D.'s translation imitates the shape of Ion's cradle.

If the Arrephoria is a rite of passage where girls prepare for married life and motherhood, then the play echoes the rite by telling the story of Kreousa's abandonment and her subsequent recognition of Ion (Burkert 2001: 47). Kreousa's reunion with Ion makes her willing to forgive Apollo. It also ensures the continuance of the political lineage of Athens. Regarding the Arrephoria, Barbara Goff argues that

This rite provides for the correct development of female identity by enactment of the ἔργα γυναικῶν [*erga gunaikōn*], the 'works of women'. During the Arrhephoria, selected girls in the service of Athena act out the tasks of motherhood and weaving, the ἔργα γυναικῶν, knowledge of which ensures that a young girl may successfully take her place in the community as an adult woman. Kreousa's story [...] has been read to draw on elements of this ritual. Kreousa's story is simultaneously a perversion of the Arrhephoria, because she unwittingly tries to kill her child. But if we allow that the ritual is legible within her actions, it can be seen to offer itself as a model for the successful integration of the female into the community.

1995: 363

H.D. seems to favour Goff's optimistic view of the rite as a model for 'successful integration', especially in the later prose interpolations of her translation.

One example of H.D.'s optimism may be found in the recognition scene. When Ion asks Kreousa whether there is anything else in his cradle returned to him by the priestess who raised him, Kreousa answers,

yes,  
 there's one thing more;  
 O, olive  
 of Athens,  
 O, crown of wild-olives,  
 I plucked  
 from the very holy rock;  
 it is sacred;  
 the very branch,  
 the goddess herself  
 brought;  
 it never loses its silver  
 immortal  
 leaf;  
 it is there;

H.D. [1927] 2003: 247–8

As in other passages of H.D.'s translation, a parallelism not evident in the Greek is quite prominent here, providing another example of the way she makes the play her own instead of reproducing Euripides' manner of expression. The olive crown is not only the

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final token that confirms Ion's recognition of his mother, but it is also a sign of his chthonic heritage as Kreousa's progeny. Since the tree is to the earth as Ion is to Kreousa, this token reaffirms the mythic association of the earth with female reproductive power.

In addition, the olive-tree fantasy in a prose commentary near the end of H.D.'s translation corresponds to the flowering rod imagery of *Trilogy* as well as to the box which is both a coffin and a cradle for the dead and reborn Ion (line 1441), whom Kreousa characterizes as an avatar of Erechtheus: the youth of their ancestor is restored by Ion (ἀνηβᾶ [anēbai], 1465). In her ecstatic elaboration on a short passage from Herodotus (8.55), H.D. describes an Athenian fleeing foreign conquerors who returns with hope to seek the sacred olive tree of his city. The Athenian

*reached out his hand toward the charred stump of the once sacred olive tree, to find –  
Close to the root of the blackened, ancient stump, a frail silver shoot was clearly  
discernible, chiselled [sic] as it were, against that blackened wood; incredibly frail,  
incredibly silver, it reached toward the light. Pallas Athene, then, was not dead. Her  
spirit spoke quietly, a very simple message.*

H.D. [1927] 2003: 257

This excerpt reflects the remembered context of the Great War, when H.D. began her translation. Given H.D.'s experience during that period of her life, her completion and publication of the translation also reflect her concerns about militarism and the threat of another world war. She had in mind the looming threat of Germany, which she worried about when she witnessed the signs of violence in Vienna while working with Freud. In that respect, H.D.'s translation of the *Ion* looks ahead to her composition of *Trilogy*. As for the classical context, Erika Simon views the Arrephoria as a ritual connected to the economy of olive production in Athens. If Ion's cradle corresponds to the basket carried by initiates in the Arrephoria, then the olive-tree imagery in H.D.'s prose interpolation should be regarded as central to the play instead of merely a flight of fancy (Simon 1983: 45).

In *Tribute to the Angels*, the second book of *Trilogy*, H.D. fuses Judeo-Christian tradition with various pagan religious sources, including that of Aphrodite. In a powerful epiphany, she testifies to a divine indwelling, insisting that

it was not a dream  
yet it was a vision,  
it was a sign,  
.....  
a half-burnt-out apple-tree  
blossoming

H.D. 1998: 87

Here and in other passages from *Tribute to the Angels*, H.D. borrows the classical tale from *Ion* and rejuvenates it in the trying circumstances of World War II. She offers a clear

'sign' of hope and renewal, demonstrating that the play is a milestone in her personal development and a palimpsest that modernizes an ancient mythic image. The parallel between the tree-images in *Trilogy* and *Ion* reflects an aesthetic view H.D. articulates through her character Raymonde Ransom in *Palimpsest*: 'Art wasn't seen any more in one plane, in one perspective, in one dimension. One didn't any more see things like that. Impressions were reflected now [...] – they were overlaid like old photographic negatives one on top of another' ([1926] 1968: 154).

### H.D.'s feminist cultural critique

I have shown how H.D. situates her version of the play in relation to her own experience and in relation to the mythic method. Now I will focus more on the way H.D. portrays Kreousa as a cultural icon in order to critique misogynist concepts, just as she does in such lyric poems as 'Helen', 'Eurydice' and 'Callypsos', and in such long poems as *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. As Yao has argued, 'H.D. expressly employed translation as a means to pursue her belief in the classics as both a precedent and a source of inspiration for a feminine literary conception distinct from the sentimental modes of her immediate female predecessors' (2002a: 102).

H.D.'s *Ion* pits the idea of a separate race of women (*genos gunaikōn*) against the role and tasks of women (*erga gunaikōn*) integrated into a patriarchal society. In doing so, she calls attention to the contradiction between the social and biological necessity of women on the one hand and, on the other, the patriarchal fantasy that women are superfluous or inferior. In keeping with a view of translation as the 'radical interrogation of meaning' (Godard 1990: 90), H.D. deploys 'the race of women', a phrase from a different Greek text, in her translation of the *Ion* in order to question the cultural assumptions of classical Greek literature (H.D. [1927] 2003: 172, 181). According to Nicole Loraux, the *genos gunaikōn* in Hesiod's *Theogony* functions as a *locus classicus* of ancient Greek beliefs about the differences between men and women and the inferiority of women (1993: 87). In H.D.'s usage, the phrase expresses the beleaguered, second-class status of women in a man's world.

By using the phrase twice in her translation, H.D. situates Kreousa's plight in terms of women as a whole, in the present as well as the past. As Mary-Kay Gamel observes, 'The play sets Creousa's situation in a larger context of women deceived, disregarded, manipulated, exploited, [and] violated' (2001: 162). H.D. not only accentuates Kreousa's representative status, but she also evokes Hesiod's account of the origin of women in the *Theogony* in order to criticize and revise it, much as she hails alternative accounts of Helen by Stesichorus and Euripides in her long poem, *Helen in Egypt*. Hesiod portrays the first woman as a punishment for men, because of the theft of fire. And just as Athena is a female produced from the male god Zeus, so is the first mortal woman created by him (Loraux 1993: 80). The ancient Greek view of femininity is summed up in the following couplet from the *Theogony*:

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ἐκ τῆς γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων  
τῆς γὰρ ὀλώϊόν ἐστι γένος καὶ φύλα γυναικῶν  
*ek tēs gàr génos esti gunaikōn thēluteráōn*  
*tēs gàr olōiōn esti génos kai phûla gunaikōn*

Hes. Th. 590–1

Loraux renders these lines as ‘The race of women and all femininity come from her (the first woman) / From her comes that cursed race, the tribes of women’ (1993: 73). Like Hesiod, Semonides of Amorgos composed a diatribe that also portrays women as created ‘separately’ (χωρῖς) from men (Lloyd-Jones 1975: 63). The opening sentence of the poem reads, χωρῖς γυναικὸς θεὸς ἐποίησεν νόον / τὰ πρῶτα (*chōrīs gunaikòs theòs epoiēsēn nōon / tà prōta*), which Diane Arnson Svarlien renders as ‘From the start, the gods made women different’ (1995).

H.D. adapts Hesiod’s phrase in her English translation of the *Ion*. But as Loraux points out, the same line of reasoning about women pervaded classical Greek culture. For example, in the *Hippolytus*, another play that inspired H.D., Euripides articulates the same idea in lines 616–17. Loraux translates the lines as ‘Women, the fraudulent curse! Why, Zeus, did you put them in the world, in the light of the sun? If you wanted to multiply the race of mortals, the source of it should not have been women’ (1993: 72). While H.D. does not include this passage in *Hippolytus TempORIZES*, she would have encountered it in the process of composing her variation on Euripides. Translations of other speeches from the *Hippolytus* appear in her *Collected Poems* (1983: 85–93).

By referring to the race of women in her *Ion*, H.D. indicates her familiarity with this ancient Greek idea. In doing so, she puts the phrase to work against misogynistic notions of femininity. By attributing the phrase to Kreousa, moreover, H.D. makes her a representative woman, not just a tragic individual. She adapts Euripides’ story by emphasizing his sympathetic portrait of Kreousa, but she also underscores the social injustice at the very heart of the plot. In order for her conflict to be resolved, Kreousa must accept her subordinate status. In coming to terms with what Freud called the reality principle, H.D.’s Kreousa reveals the social construction of this particular reality. This message comes across clearly in H.D.’s modern rendering, but knowing the literary provenance of the phrase *the race of women* enriches one’s sense of H.D.’s acuity and accomplishment as a cultural critic and translator.

Moreover, in a speech that H.D. leaves out of her version of the *Ion*, the chorus explicitly indicts male sexual misbehaviour. The part of the speech in question occurs at lines 1090–98. Anne Pippin Burnett points out that this speech is similar in tone and meaning to one in *Medea* at lines 410–30, where the chorus inveighs against men’s injustice against women, zeroing in on the power of poetry to shape widespread beliefs (Euripides 1970: 97).

Whatever reasons H.D. may have had for cutting the final antistrophe of the Chorus in her translation of the *Ion*, she clearly summarizes its sentiments in the following passage:

*And the chorus of witch-women, now taking tone from their queen, the leader of their moods and emotions, reviles the sun-god. Who is he anyway? No such things, we can imagine them thinking, ever happens in our holy city. There, intellect, justice, integrity rule, and gods and men step forth to prescribed formula. This sun-god had mixed the vibrations, has committed that most dire of spiritual sins, he has played fast and loose with the dimension of time and space. He appeared for a whim, to a girl, and that girl, their queen; and for a whim, deserted her. A god should know his place, all values have been reversed.*

H.D. [1927] 2003: 222

Like the other prose interludes in H.D.'s *Ion*, this one is marked by linguistic verve and a distinctive perspective on Euripides' plot. Like the characteristic parallelism in her verse sections, the interludes exemplify Godard's claim that the 'feminist translator [. . .] flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text' in order to critique it (1990: 94).

H.D.'s reference to reversal in the prose interlude may echo the antistrophe of lines 1096–98 (beginning παλιμφάμος ἀοιδᾶ (*palimphamos aoidā*). David Kovacs renders the passage as 'Let song reverse its course, / and the muse of blame / assail men for their amours' (Euripides 1999: 451; italics added). Liddell and Scott identify Euripides' phrase with the palinode. Citing the line in question, they define the phrase as 'a song of recantation, reproaching the male sex instead of the female.' The palinode is of course central to H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, where she defines the genre as 'a defence, explanation or apology' (1961: 1). As she points out in that poem, the palinode in question was composed by Stesichorus, to counteract the hostile characterizations of Helen pervasive in classical Greek culture.

The fragments of Stesichorus's work that remain do not tell the story of the phantom Helen, but other ancient sources do. Plato reports the story in *Phaedrus* 243a, and Isocrates provides an account of it (Campbell 1991: 92–7). Norman Austin explains that

when Stesichorus was proposing that Helen herself was only an eidolon, Xenophanes was arguing that even the gods are no more than idols, self-projections of humans, who venerate them as gods. Projection and representation were emerging as key concepts in philosophical discourse. Debates arose, among both poets and philosophers, as to the correct reading of the traditional myths.

1994: 111

In this context, H.D.'s reference to Stesichorus exemplifies her effort to redress misogynist representations of women. Indeed, H.D.'s entire career is often characterized as a persistent feminist rewriting of classical myth, a series of rebuttals of traditions that damn women. Her translation of the *Ion* should be regarded as an integral part of this project.

While it may seem surprising that H.D. excised the last antistrophe, the balance of her translation calls attention to the asymmetrical relations between men and women.<sup>8</sup> Although H.D. never explicitly identifies Apollo's treatment of Kreousa as rape, she

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certainly calls attention to his injustice against Kreousa. By Englishing Hesiod's phrase in two of Kreousa's polemics against Apollo, H.D. deploys her deep familiarity with ancient Greek culture to help improve the footing of women in the war between the sexes. As she wrote to Bryher in 1935, 'My work is creative and reconstructive, [. . .] if I can get across the Greek spirit at its highest I am helping the world, and the future' (Friedman 2002: 530).