Weighed in the Balance:  
H.D.’s Resistance to Freud in “Writing on the Wall”  

"I cannot talk to Sigmund Freud"

H.D.'s memoir Tribute to Freud has been celebrated by feminist critics for its assertion of the integrity of female selfhood and artistic power, and for its critique of male gender authority in the theorization of female sexuality. In this essay I suggest that H.D.'s critics must look more closely at the means by which she resists Freud's unwelcome interpretation of her sexuality. H.D.'s rhetorical strategy for denying Freud's interpretations turns on Freud's Jewishness in a way that demands our attention. Before we applaud H.D.'s triumph in the contest with Freud dramatized in her memoir, we must consider whether we wish to ally ourselves with the means by which she effects gains in the field of gender.  

H.D. enters into psychoanalysis with Freud in 1933 because she wants his help in understanding the strange psychic effects of "a number of severe shocks" connected with her experiences during the First World War, including the death in action of her brother in France (1974,40). One of these effects is a visionary experience to which she gives the
name "Writing on the Wall," consisting of a "series of shadow-or of light-pictures I saw projected on the wall of a hotel bedroom. . . " (1974, 41). H.D. sees these pictures on the wall in the course of a trip to Greece with her lover and companion Bryher (Winnifred Ellerman). Convalescing from double pneumonia at the end of the war, H.D. says to Bryher "'If I could only feel that I could walk the sacred way to Delphi, I know I would get well!'" (1974, 50). They make the trip, but "we were informed. . . that it was absolutely impossible for two ladies alone, at that time, to make the then dangerous trip on the winding road to Delphi" (1974, 49). Kept back from Delphi, H.D. makes her own oracle happen in the form of this vision, which becomes invested with all her love of antiquity and with her image of herself as a poet-prophet.

H.D. does not doubt that she has been granted visions; it is about their interpretation that she wants to consult Freud. However, Freud's interpretation of the material H.D. presents to him does not find favor in her eyes. Freud, H.D. tells us, views the experience as a "dangerous 'symptom'" (1974, 41), "a suppressed desire for forbidden 'signs and wonders'. . . a suppressed desire to be a Prophetess, to be important anyway, megalomania. . ." (1974, 51). Not not only does Freud fail to confirm H.D.'s place as a successor to the priestesses of Delphi, but he collapses her highest spiritual aspirations back into the baseness of the body, the female body which, in his system, as H.D. is well aware, is characterized by a basic lack.¹ H.D. presents this clash of Delphic and Freudian
interpretations through a scene in which a Greek statue is passed between analyst and analysand. Freud selects from his collection of antiquities a statue of Pallas Athené, Wingless Victory, which he hands to H.D. "'This is my favorite,' he said. . . 'She is perfect,' he said, 'only she has lost her spear'" (1974, 69). Such a statement from Freud necessarily resonates with phallic implication. For H.D. the meanings surrounding the statue are linked to those carried by her vision, in which the same goddess appears (in the aspect of Niké). These meanings gain definition in contrast to Freud's interpretations, which she resists.

Tribute to Freud has from the beginning attracted readings which raise the question of the text's representations of the phallus and its absence. Is H.D. as a woman necessarily incomplete, castrated, in Freud's view? How does she respond to such an implication, as presented in the scene of the statue? Where do we locate H.D.'s resistance in this passage? Recent critics have shown great interest in H.D.'s reaction to "Freud's all-too-Freudian presentation of the spearless Athene" (Chisolm 1992, 35-6). Curiously, these critics, while vigorously pursuing the question of H.D.'s modes of resistance to Freud elsewhere, insist on finding a silence, an absence of response in this passage. Claire Buck, for instance, finds the statue episode to be "left ambiguous by the lack of response on the part of H.D. as either author or analysand" (1991, 104). Diane Chisolm calls H.D.'s reaction "silent resistance" (1992, 35). And Susan Stanford
Friedman writes that "In Tribute to Freud, H.D. resisted Freud's interpretation of female castration only by 'reading' the statue as an allusion to Niké, the avatar of Athena as Wingless Victory, the Protectress of Athens" (1990, 304). However, I find H.D.'s resisting response to the suggestion of female castration strongly present in this scene, and by no means "only" in her reading of the statue. The clue to the necessary path of inquiry is perhaps, like Poe's purloined letter, too obvious to be discovered. H.D. points to it with the very title of the text published as the original memoir in 1944, "Writing on the Wall," but her critics have not pursued the implications of this allusion.

For H.D., the analysis itself proves to be less than a success. Under the pressure of the Nazi presence in Vienna, H.D. finds it impossible to speak freely in the manner necessary to the analytic process. She thwarts her original project to know and understand her war experiences by failing to speak with Freud about issues she knows to be crucial. In 1933, during her analysis, H.D. writes in her journal:

I have been leafing over papers in the café, there are fresh atrocity stories. I cannot talk about the thing that actually concerns me, I cannot talk to Sigmund Freud in Vienna, 1933, about Jewish atrocities in Berlin. (1974, 134-5)
That she cannot speak to Freud about Jews and Nazis, that which "actually concerns" her, impedes the progress of the analysis in general. However, in 1944, H.D. composes "Writing on the Wall," a memoir of her sessions with Freud. Although it is written after Freud's death, it must be read as an address to Freud, an articulation of the "wordless challenge" (1974, 99) that H.D. left unspoken at the time of their sessions. A decade later, H.D. is ready to speak to Freud--unilaterally--about the Jewish issue. This monologic address concerns precisely what she forced herself to remain silent about in the analytic sessions: her ideas about Freud as a Jew and about the meaning of her encounter with Jewishness as embodied by Freud. In defining this encounter she invokes classical texts of Jewish-Christian disputation, and it is through these, as we shall see, that she constitutes the resistant substructure of "Writing on the Wall."

This structure obtrudes most obviously exactly in H.D.'s eruptive response to the crucial moment in which Freud confronts her with the spearless statue. Narrating this moment in the memoir through a chain of associative recollections, H.D. seizes on the fact of Freud's Jewishness:

'She is perfect,' he said... He was speaking as an ardent lover of art and an art-collector. He was speaking in a double sense, it is true, but he was speaking of value, the actual intrinsic value of the piece; like a Jew, he was assessing its worth;
the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ran in his veins. He knew his material pound, his pound of flesh, if you will, but this pound of flesh was a pound of spirit between us, something tangible, to be weighed and measured, to be weighed in the balance and—pray God—not to be found wanting!

(1974, 70)

We cannot read this as "lack of response" or "silent resistance." H.D., responding to the affront of the statue in this extraordinary passage, summons up simultaneously two other texts thematically focused on confrontations between Jews and gentiles. Through these powerful allusions H.D. declares that she herself is engaged in just such a struggle, a dramatic contest with the highest of stakes, played out in full awareness of its paradigmatic antecedents.

What kind of contest is it? Two models are proposed. H.D. finds that Freud is speaking "like a Jew." And so, like a Jew, "He knew his. . . pound of flesh." The reference is of course to Shylock, who, in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, wields his knife and threatens to cut off a piece of his debtor's flesh. But the monumental Jew of English literature is here only half of the story, for this curious sentence that stands with one foot in Shakespeare's Venice has the other planted in biblical Babylon: "to be weighed in the balance. . . ." The citation is from an episode in the Book of
Daniel known as "Writing on the Wall," which is the title H.D. gives to both her vision and her memoir.

The direction this inquiry must take is now clear. We must read H.D.'s answer to Freud's gesture in her twofold allusion, for its dense compression does not compromise the precision of its aim. In one sentence H.D. evokes, with remarkable economy, the long and painful history of Jewish-gentile or Jewish-Christian disputation through a succession of superimposed paradigmatic moments: an episode from the Hebrew Bible, The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare's drama of the confrontation between European Christians and Jews, and Freud's radical--but Jewish?--secularism, all necessarily considered in the context of the Nazi aggression which pervades H.D.'s double time frame (1933 and 1944). In the Hebrew Bible, the gentiles are forced by miraculous demonstrations to acknowledge the superior power of the Jewish God. In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock is forced under threat of death to become a Christian. Thus we see that through the simultaneous evocation of these two powerful background texts, H.D. raises this question: in the charged confrontation of opposites played out when H.D. and Freud meet in the Berggasse, as artist and scientist, woman and man, prophetess and rationalist, whose way of thinking will prevail? Which one will prove to have the power to force the other to convert?

The Lions' Den and the Writing on the Wall
H.D. clearly has the Book of Daniel in mind when she says of the vision she sees on the hotel room wall, "There had been writing-on-walls before in Biblical, in classical literature" (1974, 50). Daniel's is the story of a Jew's virtuosity in the interpretation of dreams in the gentile kingdom to which he has been brought to live. Even a superficial comparison suggests links between Daniel, who "had understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17), and Freud, the Jew who founds psychoanalysis on the basis of virtuosic dream interpretation. The connection is confirmed by a feature of interpretive practice shared by Freud and Daniel. Daniel's prophetic powers are described in a way that stresses the paired functions of producing and interpreting visionary texts (as with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar [2:5]). The unity of dreamer and (visionary) theoretician is one of the most remarkable features of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and one which H.D. emphasizes in her retelling of his process of discovery.

But H.D. does not allow the identification of Freud with Daniel to stand unchallenged. She alludes to two well-known episodes from the Book of Daniel, and in each case she retells the story in such a way as to oust Freud from the role of Daniel. One of these is the story of Daniel in the lions' den, in which Daniel is punished for worshipping God rather than the king, Darius, in defiance of a legal decree. He is thrown into the lions' den, but in the morning is found
unharmed: "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths" (6:22). The gentile king, convinced by this demonstration of the saving power of the Jewish God, decrees that his subjects must "tremble and fear before the god of Daniel, for he is the living God... He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions" (6:25-28).

In "Writing on the Wall," H.D. reenacts this episode, but allots herself the role of Daniel. Now she is the one in the foreign land, and Freud is safe at home; she even portrays his Jewishness as a source of security: "He is at home here... I have come a long way, I have brought nothing with me. He has... the tradition of an unbroken family, reaching back... into the Holy Land" (1974, 97). Freud's study appears as a dragon's den (1974, 16) and a "mysterious lion's den" (1974, 132). Recounting her first meeting with Freud, H.D. refers to Freud's dog Yofi as "a lioness" (1974, 98), and Freud, like the ungodly Babylonians, fully expects the lioness to attack. Freud warns her "'Do not touch her--she snaps--she is very difficult with strangers.'" In response, H.D. tells us,

I not only continue my gesture toward the little chow, but crouch on the floor so that she can snap better if she wants to. Yofi... snuggles her nose into my hand and nuzzles her head, in delicate sympathy, against my shoulder. So I can say again the Professor was not always right. (1974, 98)
H.D. describes this demonstration of sympathy between the lioness and herself as part of her "wordless challenge" to Freud: "If this dog and this woman 'take' to one another, it will prove that... there is another region of cause and effect, another region of question and answer" (1974, 99). The trial of the lions' den, as in Daniel, serves to prove the existence of another region, the unworldly region of spiritual power. Only here it is H.D., rather than Daniel the Jew, who is miraculously saved. Freud now stands outside this relation of protection. As Daniel's special tie to God both protects him from harm and authoritates his interpretations, H.D.'s demonstration with the "lioness" works to dislodge Freud from the place of privileged interpreter. The power of biblical narrative can no longer serve to support his claims of interpretive authority. Instead, those very stories and texts are turned against him; the scripture that is his by tradition--as well as his beloved dog--is now used by H.D. to demonstrate the existence of a spiritual realm that negates the legitimacy of his own. In writing Freud out of the Daniel story, H.D. severs him from an apparatus for converting others to his form of truth. If it is H.D. who gloriously survives the trial of the lions' den, then it will be Freud who must bow to her God, to her own "signs and wonders," and not the other way around.

Just as H.D. displaces Freud from the role of Daniel in her retelling of the story of the lions' den, so she reworks
elements of the episode of the Writing on the Wall so as to bar Freud from occupying its moral center. H.D. sees her vision as belonging to "a tradition of warnings or messages from another world" (1974, 50). The writing that appears on the wall at a great banquet given by King Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, is such a message of warning. At the feast, Belshazzar's guests drink out of holy vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem:

they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand; and the king saw the hand as it wrote. (5:4-5)

Daniel is called in, and he reads and interprets the writing: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. . . MENE; God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (5:25-8). Belshazzar is killed the same night.

"To be found wanting," in Daniel, then, signifies a divine condemnation for a violation of the imperative to observe the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The prophetic truth of the writing is confirmed by the swiftness with which Belshazzar's death follows its
appearance. In "Writing on the Wall" the theme of the sacred and the profane plays out in a contestation, painted in the Freudian language of "slips," over the status of Freud's collection of antiquities. The phrase itself comes into being through H.D.'s exchange of letters with Freud on the subject of this collection, which includes, of course, the spearless statue of Athena. In 1938 Freud is in London, having fled Vienna. When the antiquities he had to leave behind are eventually returned to him, H.D. commemorates the event by sending him a gift of gardenias, and a note. She "scribbled on a card, 'To greet the return of the Gods.'" Freud's letter thanks her and quotes her remark as "'to greet the return of the Gods' (other people read: Goods)" (1974, 11). After this, H.D. refers to the collection with variations on the phrase, "The Gods or the Goods. . ." (1974, 12, 68). This repeating phrase, then, represents the constant possibility of mistaking, misreading, the distinction between the sacred and the profane--the possibility, that is, of committing Belshazzar's fatal error.

In what sense, then, does H.D. invoke the prophetic pronouncement read out by Daniel when she exclaims that she--or something--is "to be weighed and measured, to be weighed in the balance and--pray God--not to be found wanting" (1974, 70)? H.D. assigns Freud the role of the one who weighs and measures. She links him with Thoth, the Egyptian god who weighs the dead in the afterworld with "the Scales of Justice" (1974, 100); she writes that "He is the infinitely old symbol,
weighing the soul, Psyche, in the Balance" (1974, 97). The balance that weighs souls is particularly apt here as a metaphor for psychoanalysis: it is, like psychoanalysis, a peculiar conflation of the bodily and the spiritual. How can the worthiness of the soul be derived from a measurement made in scales? And how can Freud answer the spiritual questions H.D. has brought him through an evaluation of physical parts her body does or does not possess? She is found wanting not as a soul but as a body: she is judged to be lacking--or "wanting"--a phallus ("the Professor insisted. . .not only did I want to be a boy but I wanted to be a hero" [1974, 120]).

But H.D. makes the spearless Athena a double-edged sword. Freud appears to be using it to suggest that H.D. must recognize and come to terms with her own lack; he addresses the problems or "symptoms" manifesting themselves in her spirit in terms of a physical, bodily (non)attribute. But once he passes the charged object to H.D., she turns it around to suggest that Freud is profaning something sacred by considering the statue as an object that has value, a good rather than a god. If the statue is to be, for Freud, a symbol of H.D.'s essential female inadequacy, she will make it a symbol of Freud's essential Jewish materialism: "he was speaking of value, the actual intrinsic value of the piece; like a Jew, he was assessing its worth; the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ran in his veins" (1974, 70).

In accusing Freud of the kind of irreligiosity Daniel's prophetic warning condemned, H.D. turns the phrase "to be
found wanting" against Freud. These words, which we read first as representing Freud's insult to H.D.'s sexual integrity, must now be read as a condemnation of Freud's Jewish materialism, which parallels Belshazzar's crime of profaning the holy vessels. In a brilliant strategic move, H.D. answers Freud's imputation of lack by locating the interpretive pivot upon which his own theory, his own statue, his own scripture can be turned against him. She answers the accusation that she lacks the phallus by finding the question of the phallus itself to demonstrate a reductive materialism at the heart of psychoanalysis. Freud's science of the psyche, like, H.D. is suggesting, the religious tradition from which he comes, is tainted by an association with commerce.

He used the idiom or slang of the counting-house, of Wall Street, a businessman's concrete definite image. . . 'I struck oil. . . .' (1974, 83). This materialism is connected with phallic images: "'I struck oil' suggests business enterprise. We visualize stark uprights and skeleton-like steel cages, like unfinished Eiffel Towers. . . ." (1974, 83)

Indeed, H.D. is suggesting that the distinction between those with the phallus and those without it is a merely material distinction, and that Freud's insistence on the importance of this distinction comes directly out of the overly
materialistic, insufficiently spiritual, specifically Jewish tradition that is his. H.D. embeds the charged question of the phallus and her lack of it squarely in the fact of Freud's Jewishness. Having established this correspondence as a means of defense, a path of escape from her entrapment in Freud's theory suggests itself with all the force of centuries of Christian polemic against the Jews.

We see this most clearly in those passages in which H.D. addresses what she sees as Freud's materialist views directly. On one occasion, Freud speaks of his fear for his grandchildren, around the time when H.D. has seen swastikas chalked on the pavement outside his house.

It may have been that day or another that the Professor spoke of his grandchildren. In any case, whenever it was, I felt a sudden gap, a severance, a chasm or a schism in consciousness, which I tried to conceal from him. It was so tribal, so conventionally Mosaic. As he ran over their names and the names of their parents, one felt the old impatience, a sort of intellectual eye-strain, the old boredom of looking out historical, genealogical references in a small-print school or Sunday-school Bible... He was worried about them (and no small wonder), but I was worried about something else. I did not then realize the reason for my anxiety. I knew the Professor would move on somewhere else,
before so very long, but it seemed the eternal life he visualized was in the old Judaic tradition. He would live forever like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in his children's children, multiplied like the sands of the sea. That is how it seemed to me his mind was working, and that is how, faced with the blank wall of danger, of physical annihilation, his mind would work. (1974, 62-3)

H.D. makes these remarks against the background of the Nazi presence which threatens Freud and his family; in her reference to "physical annihilation," H.D. seems to understand (if not in 1933 then perhaps in 1944) the immediacy of the threat of death for the Jews of Vienna.\(^5\) She is impatient with Freud's failure to believe, as she does, in immortality. For her "it was a fact" (1974, 43); for Freud it was "the last and greatest fantasy, the gigantic wish fulfillment"--at least, so "wrote the Professor. . . He may even have believed this" (1974, 103). H.D.'s response to his fears for his family is a declaration that from her point of view, the problem is already solved, at least for him: "he himself already counted as immortal" (1974, 63). She finds it a shame that Freud's thinking is so limited, "Mosaic," as he faces the "blank wall" of death.

Here we may begin to see the role H.D. defines for her own vision. The blank wall is exactly the wall bare of the prophetic "Writing on the Wall" which H.D.'s spiritual gifts
can provide. It is death as seen in the time of the old Mosaic law before the coming of a prophet who can promise eternal life. Who can play that role for psychoanalysis, with its unfortunate grounding in Jewish materialism? Who can save Freud?

"He knew his material pound, his pound of flesh"

We must now look to the other half of the citation whose implications we have been pursuing. In alluding to Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, H.D. zeroes in unerringly on a text in which exactly the elements of her own conflict with Freud come together in constellation. In the play as in the memoir, a battle is fought over the interpretation of sacred texts, a battle in which two things of seemingly very different orders are simultaneously at stake: the threat of castration, and the soul's eternal life.

As in the Book of Daniel, an exemplary contest is staged between Jew and gentile. The trial scene of Merchant may be read as a representation of the struggle between Judaism and Christianity, "a hermeneutic drama, reflecting the contest between Christian and Jew for the possession of the Hebrew Scriptures," and H.D.'s engagement with the play turns on a similar interpretation. Where Shakespeare's characters struggle over the Hebrew Scriptures, H.D. and Freud struggle for control of a different sacred text: H.D.'s own visions, which, she writes, come from the same source as scripture.
For H.D., however, an allusion is here the fulfillment of a wish: she invokes a textual paradigm in which her own interests triumph over those of Freud-as-Jew in no uncertain terms.

Shakespeare's Shylock, the usurer, lends money to Antonio against the bond of a pound of flesh, "to be cut off and taken/ in what part of your body pleaseth me" (1987, 1.3.143-4). As Shylock eagerly whets his knife, he embodies a threat at once castrative and murderous; he declares that he intends to cut out Antonio's heart. For H.D. to invoke this scene in her narrative at the moment of Freud's showing her the spearless Athena is in no way accidental; she is accusing Freud of a kind of materialism akin to Shylock's, in which body parts are weighed and measured for their value. H.D. clearly conveys her sense of injury as Freud shows her the statue, suggesting that she, like it, is castrated. To the extent that this imputation conflicts with a competing sense of herself as whole, Freud is in effect threatening her with castration at this moment, and thus the association to Shylock is entirely apt.

In the single sentence in which H.D. incorporates references to the "pound of flesh" and to "weighed in the balance," two possible personae of the Jew stand in tension. Daniel is the wise man whose dream interpretations derive from divine authority, whom H.D. hopes to find in Freud. The second model, Shylock, is evoked for H.D. in the moment of
confrontation over the statue which H.D. perceives as a threat of symbolic castration.

In "Advent," the incident of the statue of Athena is told differently. Here, the confrontation apparently takes place on the occasion of H.D.'s first meeting with Freud, in the course of a conversation that also includes a discussion of the fees for H.D.'s sessions. H.D. did not pay for her analysis; the arrangements were made and paid for by Bryher. Insofar as H.D. does not pay for her own sessions, she symbolically owes a debt to Freud. Thus she presents us with a Freud who, like Shylock, is a Jew ready to seize what is due him through an act of castrative violence. With this suggestion of violence, the scales weighing Freud's two personae tip and Freud falls into the role of Shylock. Borne by a Shakespearean momentum of plot, H.D.'s narrative spins out a parallel to the action of The Merchant of Venice, a singular trajectory in which the one who threatens to perform a castration (Shylock/Freud) finds himself, instead, converted to Christianity against his will.

The great dramatic reversal of the play occurs at the moment in which Shylock wields his knife to cut Antonio's flesh. Portia has attempted to make Shylock show Christian mercy of his own accord, but as he remains immovable in his insistence on receiving what is due him by the letter of the law, Portia moves to defeat him on his own terms, using the very law with which he is allegorically and personally identified as a weapon against him. Portia ensures that "Thou
shall have justice more than thou desirest" (Shakespeare 1987, 4.1.312).

As Portia begins her arguments, she is "recognized" by Shylock, who believes his claim will be granted, as "A Daniel come to judgement! Yea, a Daniel!" (4.1.223). The name Daniel becomes a synecdochic representation of the Old Testament legacy in contestation. As Portia maneuvers the trial to turn against Shylock, Gratiano taunts, "A Daniel, still say I, a second Daniel! / I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word" (4.1.336-7). What the Jew has taught him--Jewish scripture, Jewish law--he turns back as a weapon against the Jew. The name Daniel comes to stand for the textual legacy lost by the Jews and gained by the Christian successors. H.D. has worked in her text exactly to strip Freud of the claim to an identity with Daniel; in her allusive window onto the world of Shakespeare's Venice she now suggests that she herself dons, with Portia, the mantle of Daniel the wise man.

Portia succeeds using H.D.'s weapons and accomplishes H.D.'s aims, thwarting a castrative violence by her rhetorical brilliance. She passes with ease between gendered identities, lightheartedly declaring to her waiting-maid Nerissa that the men will see them "in such a habit /That they shall think we are accomplished /With what we lack" (3.4.60-2). She controls the scene of the trial, which, Lewalski tells us, is "a precise analogue of the sinner's trial in the court of Heaven," and allied to "traditional literary and
iconographical presentations of the 'Parliament of Heaven,' which include scenes of the weighing of the soul, H.D.'s icon for psychoanalysis (1962, 338-9).

Portia effects the extraordinary turn of events in which Shylock is stripped of his seemingly certain victory by quite literally turning the scales against him. The scales are Shylock's defining theatrical prop, representing at once his murderous avarice and his Judaic legalism. They also serve, for H.D., as the immediate associative link between the play and the Book of Daniel; they are the symbol of the prophetic condemnation of the Jewish God in the biblical writing on the wall, and, as we have seen, H.D. has proposed them as a symbol for the psychoanalytic encounter. Portia, however, turns the frightening apparatus of Shylock's castrative violence into the mechanism of his defeat. She does this by stipulating that Shylock cut precisely the contracted pound of flesh.

Shed no blood, nor cut thou less nor more
But just a pound of flesh. If thou tak'st more
Or less than a just pound. . .
   . . .nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,
Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.
(4.1.321-28)

If we return now to H.D.'s sentence about what is "to be weighed in the balance," we see that once again, H.D. has
evoked an intertext which suggests a way in which these words may be turned against Freud. "He knew his material pound, his pound of flesh, if you will, but this pound of flesh was a pound of spirit between us, to be weighed in the balance and--pray God--not to be found wanting!" In Merchant, at first it is the debtor Antonio who is found wanting; that is, he is short of funds and cannot pay his debt, and Shylock is eager to make him forfeit a piece of his own flesh. Simultaneously, we know that H.D. fears that she has been judged by Freud in his guise as the "Bearer of the Scales of Justice" (1974, 100), weighed and found wanting, spearless, castrated. But, in the context of the trial scene, we see that the lines may also be read as referring to the pound of cut-off flesh, which, if "found wanting" when laid on the balance, would cost the Jew his property and his life. For this is the sentence against Shylock; he is found guilty of making an attempt on the life of a citizen of Venice, and sentenced to death, a sentence which may be commuted to the confiscation of half his property on the condition that he convert. It is this turn of events, orchestrated by Portia, that leads to the famously uncomedic withdrawal of Shylock in the fourth act, silenced and bereft of his daughter, possessions, and the religious identity he has so passionately defended throughout the play.

I have suggested that H.D., in "Writing on the Wall," forces a similarly undesired--indeed, posthumous--"conversion" on Freud. In what sense does she do this? Having evoked the trial scene of Merchant and Portia's triumph over and
conversion of the castrating Jew, H.D. immediately sets off on a retelling of Freudian theory in which she freely recasts Freud's work in Christian terms. She writes that Freud has
dared to say that the dream had its worth and value in translatable terms, not the dream merely of a Pharaoh or a Pharaoh's butler, not the dream merely of the favorite child of Israel... but the dream of everyone, everywhere. (1974, 70-1)

In H.D.'s retelling, Freud—like Christ—makes what was once the province of a special ("chosen") people accessible to "everyone, everywhere." H.D., proceeding with an account of Freud's theory, persists in injecting a Christianized content; we are told that Freud has said,
even if not stated in so many words... that this consciousness proclaimed all men one; all nations and races met in the universal world of the dream... man, understanding man, would save mankind. (1974, 71)

H.D. pegs Freud's method as specifically Jewish: he generated his theories "With precise Jewish instinct for the particular in the general, for the personal in the impersonal or universal, for the material in the abstract" (1974, 71). H.D.'s retelling of Freud's theoretical project emphasizes
precisely the general, the universal, and the abstract ("all nations and races met in the universal world of the dream. . ."): clearly she is attempting here, according to her own definitions of the Jewish, to de-Judaize Freud's work. The Christianizing movement becomes entirely explicit when H.D. writes, "There was another Jew who said, the kingdom of heaven is within you" (1974, 104).

In consonance with the atmosphere of The Merchant of Venice, H.D.'s "conversion" of Freud is Pauline in spirit--but with a twist. Critics of Merchant emphasize the importance of Paul for any consideration of the religious implications of the play. Lawrence Danson, in discussing the question of Antonio's malice toward Shylock, quotes this passage from Romans:

> For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a real Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. (Romans 2:25-9)⁸

Paul declares circumcision a spiritual matter rather than a physical one. In this we may see the prototype of H.D.'s project of, we might say, spiritualizing castration. In her role as prophet to psychoanalysis, H.D. suggests the possibility of a revision of Freud's emphasis on the physical, literal penis; the phallus or its lack could also become "a
matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal." Paul writes that Abraham was blessed before he was circumcised: "He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. . ." (Romans 4:11). Precisely this--the "sign or seal"--is something H.D. believes she can be shown to possess.

The words "sign" and "seal" come up in H.D.'s passage on the dictionary meanings of the word "signet." Her interest in this word derives from a vision of a serpent and a thistle she had around the age of eighteen. Later, in the Louvre, H.D. found a "signet-ring" or "seal-ring" bearing the design of her original vision (1974, 65). Freud has, among his antiquities, some ancient rings, "and I thought of my signet-ring. . . though I felt curious about the rings at that time, I did not suggest his opening the door of the case and showing them to me" (1974, 67). Instead, Freud shows her the spearless Athena.

H.D.'s description of the way in which the seal-ring is "'my' little ring" (1974, 66) serves to demonstrate that while Freud may possess the "sign or seal" physically, in the form of a ring in his collection, H.D. possesses it spiritually; it has been given to her in a vision. In the same way, Freud possesses a statue of Athena, which he regards as a valuable objet d'art, but H.D. has been granted a vision of the goddess, which is hers spiritually. The physical "sign or seal" of circumcision, originally given, says Paul, as an outward sign of the righteousness Abraham had by faith,
became, latterly, a tribal marking, given according to birth—and to gender. Through the intervention of Christ, the mark of righteousness has become a matter of the spirit, not of the body. Freud as a man possesses the phallus, and as a Jew carries the mark of circumcision. H.D., in directing us to look at the scene of the statue through The Merchant of Venice, suggests that the aspect of Freud's theory that insists on the importance of the physical possession of the phallus is an Old Law that calls for a New—a new order in which one would be judged not by birth or by the bodily marks of gender but by one's spiritual worthiness alone. "God... will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith" (Romans 3:30). It is not accidental that H.D. ends her meditation on the dictionary meanings of the word "signet" with a final throwaway association: she comes across the word "signum," "And as I write that last word, there flashes into my mind the associated in hoc signum or rather, it must be in hoc signo and vinces" (1974, 66). The Constantinian implications of H.D.'s claim to the "sign or seal" briefly show themselves.

The ring as a proof of identity plays a prominent role in The Merchant of Venice. A ring confirms that the Dr. Balthasar of the trial and Portia share a single identity, proving that Portia has passed between worlds (from Belmont to Venice and back) and between genders. The circulation of the ring performs another extraordinary function in Merchant. When Portia gives the ring to Bassanio in token of their
engagement, she gives with it certain promises. But in
tricking him to give it back to her when she is in disguise,
she symbolically annuls her promises of wifely submission:

Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love,
And be my vantage to exclaim on you. (3.2.166-174)

In this speech she declares herself and her possessions
"converted" to Bassanio's male authority. In the trial scene,
however, she wins back the ring, proving herself not, after
all, one to be converted, but the one who--so conspicuously--
has the power to convert. The signet ring that is H.D.'s
spiritual possession, like Portia's ring in Merchant,
signifies that the submission of "...an unlessoned girl,
unschooled, unpractised. ..." (3.2.151) to husbandly
authority--or the submission implied in H.D.'s consenting to
lie down on the analytic couch, "shy and frightened and gauche
as an overgrown school-girl" (1974, 99) --can be revoked and
reversed by the power of a ring that shows who one really is.

Critical Views
Critical treatments of Tribute to Freud, which highlight its project of asserting female selfhood and formulating "a critique of male gender authority in nurtured antagonism to the male mentor" fail to attend to the theological subtext which nurtures the antagonism they praise (DuPlessis 1986, 75). The issue of H.D.'s specific engagement with Freud's Jewishness is neglected to a remarkable extent. Susan Stanford Friedman writes that of H.D.'s various accounts of her encounter with Freud, Tribute To Freud was least revealing "about the nature of her rebellion against Freud (1990, 297)." What it does reveal, however, is the insistent reliance of this rebellion on patterns of thought and argument taken from Christian theology--exactly those aspects of Christian theology which, in their emphasis on the supersessive nature of Christianity, suggest that the Jews have no further reason to exist.\(^\text{10}\) In mustering up a familiar roster of accusations against the Jewish religion--it is primitive ("tribal"), tiresomely legalistic ("small print"); it has only a material, not a spiritual, sense of immortality (one lives on through one's children)--H.D. borrows the patterns of thought which express the supersessive ambitions of the Christian church as a model for an imagined supersession in the sphere of gender.\(^\text{11}\) The celebrated feminist project of "Writing on the Wall" takes its forward impetus from the logic of Christian eschatology, freely borrowing from the tradition in which the flourishing of a New Israel depends upon the ruination of the old.\(^\text{12}\)
Feminist critics have shied away from confronting this aspect of H.D.'s argument, but we must examine her means as well as her feminist ends. "Writing on the Wall" was published in 1944, at the height of the Nazi murder of the European Jews.

H.D.'s critics tend to excuse her in advance from any imputation of anti-Semitism, thereby putting the issue beyond the critical pale. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman, for instance, identify the Shylock reference in *Tribute*, but they do not inquire very far into its meanings: indeed, they assure us in advance that H.D. "invokes and then transforms anti-Semitic stereotypes." H.D.'s political sensitivity is treated as a given, deflecting any serious critical inquiry into the reference:

Why the anti-Semitic evocation of Shylock in a work so resolutely and perceptively antifascist as *Tribute to Freud*, by a woman who was in 1933 already involved with Bryher in Jewish refugee work?

They are satisfied with calling the Shylock reference "in any event a low blow, a flirtation with prejudice attempted perhaps for the purpose of revenge," and do not press further (DuPlessis and Friedman 1981, 421-2). The evidence for H.D.'s political blamelessness is tangential at best, often, as above, relying on Bryher's work: "she was every bit as antifascist as Bryher;" "She broke off her correspondence with Pound in 1933 because of his anti-Semitism, and helped Bryher"
to some extent with her massive efforts to gain papers and jobs for some hundred religious and political refugees."\textsuperscript{13}

Friedman argues that H.D. profoundly identified with Jews; her "choice of the Biblical phrase 'the scattered remnant'. . . evokes Isaiah's promise of redemption for the 'scattered remnant' of exiled Jews and by extension all those in spiritual diaspora from the madness of the mainstream" (1986, 95). Isaiah's reference to a "scattered remnant" is also, however, taken up by Paul to refer to those few Jews who may still be saved through Christian faith.\textsuperscript{14} To the extent that H.D.'s attempt to "save" Freud in covertly Christian terms insistently denies the validity of his Jewish identity in a historical moment when the right of Jews to survive was threatened as never before, it can hardly be said, as Friedman does, that "Identification with Otherness rather than a perpetuation of it" was part of "the sensitivity with which H.D. approached the subject of race" (1986, 115).

It is exactly the implications for "Otherness" of H.D.'s method of resisting Freud that must be considered in examining the relationship of "Writing on the Wall" to a feminist project. Jill Robbins's book \textit{Prodigal Son/Elder Brother} points to some of the implications of the Christian claim for "the supersession of the elder brother by the younger brother." Such Pauline readings "posit a violent hierarchy between the old and new" (1991, 4). Robbins cites a passage from Augustine's "Exposition on the Psalms" in which we may see the antecedents of H.D.'s description of Freud's material
view of the statue of Athena as "this little piece of metal you hold in your hand. . . assessing its worth" (1974, 70). Augustine writes, "The Jew carries a book, from which a Christian may believe. Our librarians are what they have become. . ." (Robbins 1991, 6). In emphasizing Freud's purely material relationship to his antiquities, H.D. paints him as, if not a librarian, a museum curator. He only carries the object, while H.D. believes from it. But, Robbins argues, what this interpretive procedure most consistently suppresses is the self-understanding of Judaic exegesis. . . The Jews are related to the Old Testament book physically or carnally: they \textit{carry} it; the Christians are related to it spiritually: they \textit{believe} from it. This polemic against the "dead letter" (i.e., Jewish literalism), indeed the entire figural discourse, depends above all on suppressing the self-understanding of Judaic exegesis. (1991, 11-12)

This is precisely what H.D. has had to do in order to bring off her rhetorical maneuver in which Freud's materialism is made to disqualify him for the interpretive authority she fears he might otherwise have claimed in relation to the Daniel story. In order to suggest that writing on the wall condemning the profanation of sacred objects might speak against Freud's carnal relation to his antiquities, she must
disregard the spiritual integrity of the tradition of strict monotheism which demands that Daniel, and all Jews, declare such idols false gods. H.D. works to generalize and dilute those aspects of his work she finds related to his Jewishness, and breaks off by announcing that she "cannot talk to Sigmund Freud." Robbins, through her reading of Emmanuel Levinas, goes on to ask how it may be possible "to write with an awareness of the other, how to write in a way that is not a suppression and appropriation of the other" (1991, 18). H.D.'s critics must not embrace her answer to Freud before asking the same question.

What is at stake for feminist criticism? Freud has failed or refused to understand H.D. as she understands herself; he refuses what we might call her feminist self-understanding. Seeking a strategy of redress, H.D. taps into the powerful tradition of Christian supersession, with its grand apparatus for suppressing Jewish self-understanding. But, in supporting H.D.'s efforts as "With Freud, against Freud, through Freud she struggled for gender authority" (DuPlessis 1986, 74), must we applaud her tactic of subsuming Freud's Jewish identity?

Those critics who try to reassert the historical context in which H.D. met Freud and wrote about him, the era of the persecution and murder of European Jews, are soundly rebuffed. Friedman criticizes Alfred Kazin, who in a book review quotes the passage in which H.D. responds to Freud's fears for his grandchildren by criticizing his "conventionally Mosaic" view;
Kazin calls it "astounding" (1984, 15). Friedman classes the essay with other views of H.D.'s "political escapism," writing that Kazin "misses entirely the significance H.D. gives to Nazism in *Tribute to Freud*" (1986, 93 n.2). But what exactly is the significance of Nazism in this text? We cannot take it as a given.

In this text it is the thought of Nazism that impedes the movement of the text, the process of the analysis, the project of coming to knowledge. What accounts for this stoppage? Friedman writes that for H.D., "To discuss her fear of Nazi atrocities in 1934 would require her to do the unmentionable--link Freud, the potential victim, with Nazi victimizers" (1990, 340). "The forbidden thought" responsible for H.D.'s "refusal to speak," Friedman writes, "is a kind of feminist, antifascist fantasy akin to Woolf's *Three Guineas*, one that identifies the rise of Nazism with the authority of the father in the patriarchal family and state" (1990, 296). But what is even more "unmentionable" and more "forbidden" than an antifascist fantasy is a fascist one. In order to speak freely, H.D. would also have to acknowledge the link between the supersessive structure of her own fantasies and the murderous acts of the "Nazi victimizers."16

**Penelope's Web**

What can we say, finally, about the meaning of H.D.'s visions in regard to the war they recall and the war they
presage? H.D. describes the signs of the Nazi presence at the time of her analysis: "Already in Vienna, the shadows were lengthening or the tide was rising" (1974, 58). The language in which H.D. communicates her visions precisely opposes the metaphors she uses to represent the coming threat. In the writing on the wall, she first thinks she sees shadows, but "It was a silhouette cut of light, not shadow..." (1974, 45). In another vision, described in "Advent," H.D. sees "a sea that is level yet broken in a thousand perfectly peaked wavelets like the waves in the background of a Botticelli" (1974, 160). Just as she suggests that her vision of "writing on the wall" transforms "the blank wall of danger, of physical annihilation" (1974, 63), these visionary scenes of light replacing shadow and of the tide fixed in painterly perfection are positioned to deny or undo the metaphorical lengthening shadows and rising tide of the Nazi threat.

H.D. tells us that she values mystery over inquiry: "In Corfu, someone placed two white lilies and one red tulip on my table. Bryher probably. But there seemed mystery about it. I did not ask Bryher about it. I had learned long ago not to inquire too deeply into the mystery" (1974, 122). She prefers to cut off investigation when it threatens to reveal something banal, or worse. The desire to know the thoughts of her heart, to paraphrase Daniel, brings H.D. to Freud, but the complexity of the issues that arise, and in particular the patterns that suggest themselves to her as a means of resistance to those of Freud's suggestions that she cannot
accept, cause her original spirit of inquiry to retreat into embrace of mystery. She writes of one of her dream-experiences, "Perhaps there is no answer to it or it may be dangerous to ask it, for the wrong answer (as with the Sphinx in Egypt) may bring death" (1974, 161). Interpretation proves dangerous, for it could reveal that death itself—if only in the form of a denial—is encoded in the symbols that represent her experience of war. H.D.'s struggle against the possibility of this reading mobilizes her effort to revise Freud's two theoretical matrices, Judaism and psychoanalysis, neither of which provides for the kind of immortality she seeks to have affirmed. Of her writing and rewriting of her visions, she comments, "It is obviously Penelope's web that I am weaving" (1974, 153). Like Penelope's weaving, this is work that must never reach an end. If her own visions carry a meaning that must be read as death rather than immortality, she does not want to know.

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Susan Stanford Friedman confirms H.D.'s familiarity with Freudian theory with evidence from H.D.'s letters to Bryher: "In a discourse replete with the technical psychoanalytic vocabulary erased from Tribute to Freud, H.D. reported on their analysis of her erotic fantasies, dreams, and experiences with masturbation, lesbianism, bisexuality, penis envy, the primal scene. . . Where Tribute to Freud drew fine portraits of an etherealized 'family romance'. . . the letters explicitly describe conversations about mother fixation and fear of castration." (1990, 298).

2Friedman finds the meaning of the statue scene revealed only in H.D.'s private or unpublished texts, such as the poem "The Master."

3In 1956 it was republished in book form as Tribute to Freud, now including "Advent," a text consisting of journal entries which H.D. says were "taken direct from the old notebooks of 1933" (1974, xiv). H.D. was composing both Trilogy and The Gift around the time she wrote "Writing on the Wall."

4H.D. was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and raised within the teaching of the Moravian Christian sect. Details of H.D.'s Moravian heritage can be found in Guest, 1984.

5Friedman quotes a letter of 12 May 1933: "H.D. wrote to Bryher that Freud, during one of their sessions, 'broke down and sobbed about the fate awaiting his grandchildren." (1990, 289).


Danson 1978, 32. See also Lewalski for Pauline interpretations of Merchant.

Balthasar, the name Portia takes while in male disguise, is, of course, a version of the name Daniel goes by among the Babylonians.

"The genocidal note is already present in the superseding or displacement myths. . . the Nazi 'final solution' was a logical extension of the thought of those church fathers and councils who declared God was finished with the Jewish people" (Littell 1975, 30).

The supersessive motif also appears in a strand of H.D.’s analysis that explores a fantasy of replacing her older brother in her mother’s affections. In the first pages of "Writing on the Wall" H.D. writes of J.J. van der Leeuw, a young and promising patient of Freud’s whom she saw as Freud’s likely successor. Van der Leeuw was killed when the plane he was flying crashed in Africa, and H.D. tells Freud that “I came back to Vienna to tell you how sorry I am.” Freud replies: "You have come to take his place" (1974, 6). H.D.’s associations lead from van der Leeuw to her older brother, whom she feels her mother favored (1974, 33), and who was killed in the First World War. Van der Leeuw’s death demonstrates a failure of Freud’s interpretive authority (one issue in van der Leeuw's analysis was a suicidal tendency connected with his flying), and this failure coincides with the vacancy of the place of the elder brother, a place now open for H.D. to occupy. The idea of replacing the elder brother in the parent's love operates for H.D. simultaneously in a familial and a theological context, for this is, famously, the pattern of sibling rivalry between Christians and Jews for God's favor.
The New Testament and the early Church often figured the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as a relationship between elder and younger brothers. . .the supersession of the elder brother by the younger brother—as in the case of Esau and Jacob—prefigures the supersession of the Jewish people by their younger brother, the Christian people, as in the verse from Genesis cited by Paul: 'the elder will serve the younger' (Rom. 9:12).

(Robbins 1991, 4)

12Richard L. Rubenstein writes that Christian hatred for Jews is related "to one of the oldest conflicts between Jew and Christian, that of who had the right truly to be reckoned as the elect of the Lord. By insisting that it was the New Israel, the Church made the claim that only its adherents were truly Jews before the Lord. Those who prized this status were necessarily threatened by the real Jews, who challenged the claim simply by their continued existence" (1966, 6-7).

13Friedman 1990, 340; Friedman 1986, 115. This last article treats H.D.'s attitude toward race, dealing primarily with H.D.'s involvement with figures from the Harlem Renaissance.

14"'Though the Israelites be countless as the sands of the sea, only a remnant shall be saved. . .'" Romans 9:27.

15H.D.'s attack on the materiality of Freud's relation to the statue discounts not only the tradition of Jewish monotheism evoked in the Daniel intertext but Freud's own resolute secularism, which requires that he regard his antiquities as something other than "gods."
A great deal has been written on the relationship of Christian anti-Semitism to the events of the Holocaust. Rosemary Radford Reuther, for instance, writes, "the teaching and preaching of Christianity in the churches . . . continues to inculcate the myth of the carnal, legalistic, and obsolete 'Jew.' This very suppression of Jewish history and experience from Christian consciousness is tacitly genocidal. What it says, in effect, is that the Jews have no further right to exist after Jesus. We repress the memory of their continued existence and our dealings with them so that it appears that 'after Christ' Jews disappear, and only Christians remain as the heirs of Jewish history and the people with a future" (1975, 327).