

KRISTIN PREVALLET

**“THAT PREMONITION WE ALL KNOW,
THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE
SOMEWHERE ELSE,/OR THIS WILL
HAPPEN AGAIN—WHERE? WHEN?”**

A MEDITATION ON H.D.'S THE WALLS DO NOT FALL

*The rain falls, here, there
sand drifts; eternity endures*

The Temple of Amen-Ra in Luxor, Egypt was built around 1084 BC.

It marks a transition from the the worship of multiple gods, to a singular and omnipotent One.

It marks a shift in historical consciousness from the materialism of worshipping the earth and its cycles to a spiritualism that worships an invisible, invincible and singular God.

The word Amen means “hidden,” and the god Amen is all powerful and invisible, and within his name is the assimilation of all gods, whether they be of vegetation, of water, or of the human body.

This assimilation of all into One was not without political consequences.

Amen was the prominent god of the Southern Thebes region, and when in the eleventh dynasty (c.2050 BC) Theban kings unified Egypt against the anarchy that marked the shift from the Old to the Middle Kingdom, Amen was officially made the God of all.

The first step to unification was to eliminate the multiple gods that kept the people isolated in small, independent communities of worship.

The most popular god of the Egyptians that posed the greatest threat to Amen’s religious victory was Ra, the sun-god.

Ra was known to be all-powerful but he was not invisible; he co-existed with the multiple other material gods which he allowed to exist beneath him in their individual manifestations.

The Priests of Amen knew that Ra had to be usurped and so they added the name of Amen to that of Ra, and declared that this god represented the hidden and mysterious powers which created and sustained the universe.

To make their plan work, the Priests of Amen also devised a mechanical statue of their God and placed it in the inner chamber of Amen's temple at Karnak, Thebes (2000 B.C.).

When the statue nodded its head, or moved its arm to choose its High Priest or Kings, no one could deny the God's trans-substantiative powers.

These tricks of puppetry and naming gradually secured the elimination, not only of the worship of Ra, but also all of the other material gods that Ra preserved.

Although there was an unsuccessful revolt against Amen attempted by Amenophis IV, gradually the people were led towards the worship of one, omnipotent deity, the god Amen.

Because he was hidden, Amen became even more powerful than the Kings themselves.

Rameses III gave away the riches of most of his kingdom to the Priests of Amen:

2,844,357 loaves of fine bread

42,030 jugs of wine

304,093 flasks of incense

770,200 bundles of vegetables

Amen became the sole God of all Egypt, and his Priests were a corporate entity that provided work for 62,626 Egyptians.

In 1923 H.D. visited Karnak, the temple city of Amen, and took a tour of nearby Luxor where a year earlier the tomb of Tutankhamen had been uncovered.

She sought to understand the power of language to reveal the traces of invisibility.

The ruins of Karnak date back to a small settlement living there around 3200 BC, and its oldest temple is for Mont, an ancient war god.

Every new ruler for the next 3000 years added his own structures, temples, and houses over and around it, the most substantial being the complex of temples for Amen-Ra.

The builders from new eras did not demolish the remains of previous rulers; so Karnak is one of the most unique manifestations of the palimpsest in known history.

Because there were so many builders, there is no plan or design for the city, and its layout is chaotic.

Every layer of stone represents a new style and era, with differing interpretations of hieroglyphic stories of the kings upon kings who were buried there.

Amen's temple city kept the layers of time still visible throughout the ages.

London, where H.D. lived during the war, has not.

With every invasion, a new city was built to smother and erase the ruins.

In 1942, as H.D. is composing her epic poem *Trilogy*, the city is being destroyed by bombs.

She refuses to leave.

Susan Stanford Friedman writes that she chose to remain in London during the entirety of the war, not wanting to escape, either physically or psychologically, "the gaping walls and constant death that surround her."

She wrote *Trilogy* as a means of restoring the psychic and spiritual walls that had been broken down by war.

Throughout the poem she superposes 20th century London onto B.C. Karnak and releases "incongruent monsters" from history's sub-conscious.

She constructs language around the earth's—and humanities'—possible renewal.

illusion of lost-gods, daemons;
gambler with eternity,

initiate of the secret wisdom,
bride of the kingdom,

reversion of old values,
oneness lost, madness.
walls,

[s31]

Although making the past and the present indecipherable is to risk madness, the poet is in control of her vision.

The bombs of London open Karnak as ghosts of the Many rise up and rebel against the One who suffocated them beneath layers and layers of churches and cathedrals.

When they speak, a palimpsest will fall into place, and a new story will work towards the rebirth of the war-shattered psyche.

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The use of palimpsest to layer similar events throughout time is a means of re-examining accepted truths and uprooting familiar stories so that when they are retold they make sense to a new generation, with a new set of catastrophes to confront.

Long before the rule of Amen, when Osiris and Isis were the most popular gods, the earth was shattered not by bombs but by cycles of vegetation—years when the crop was minimal compared to years when the earth was plentiful; seasons when the rain did not fall and the sun scorched, ruining the crops.

So it is not accidental that H.D., when attempting to reconstruct a ruined world, would call upon these deities of vegetation, the gods and goddesses historically called upon when the earth was in need of rebirth.

She begins “The Walls Do Not Fall” by associating the fall of London with the barren earth—and she superposes the gods of vegetation that are associated with the renewal of the earth, onto 20th-century London.

The multiple vegetation deities become threads of H.D.’s own story, which itself develops into a prophesy of hope.

She layers the names of the gods and goddesses atop one another, making the link from Amen, Osiris and Adonis to Christ, and from Isis and Astarte (Aphrodite, Venus) to Mary.

Part of the potential of palimpsest within poetic language is the ability to layer mythology, history, time, space, and ritual into a single text of a single language which allows all the layers, no matter how disparate, to be constantly present.

Myth is not a single-sourced truth that preserves primordial states of consciousness.

It is a multi-chambered structure in which every story has its origin in splinters of other stories, and those splinters are themselves impossible to trace.

If Amen is present in H.D.’s *Trilogy*, it is not because the puppet god is sitting comfortably in his temple, surrounded by his priests who have successfully declared him the God of gods.

Rather, he is broken apart, haunted by the gods he suppressed because those gods are housed within him: Osiris, Ra, Adonis.

Christ, like Amen, was made to be the One, and he too is present in the poem—but the multiple gods within him are all likewise revealed.

Amen, Adonis, Osiris, Ra. H.D. reveals that there were many “Ones” throughout the ages, and no matter where they enter into mythology, they are all easily splintered back into the “Many” from which they came.

Splintered the crystal of identity,
shattered the vessel of integrity,

till the Lord Amen,
paw-er of the ground,

bearer of the curled horns,
bellows from the horizon:

here am I, Amen-Ra,
Amen, Aries, the Ram;

[*Walls*, s21]

Amen is always in italics throughout the poem, perhaps because that word recalls both the Egyptian god's name and the affirmation at the end of prayer:

“we have always worshipped Him / we have always said / forever and ever *amen*
[*Walls*, stanza 17].”

The word *Amen* is traced to Amen, who was called “the Hidden,” although he was not always invisible.

When he was still co-existing with other deities, Amen was depicted either as a goose or as a ram with curved horns.

When H.D. says Amen in *Trilogy*, she is not paying tribute through prayer to his invisible grace.

Rather she is resurrecting what the priests of Amen suppressed when they made him God of gods—that as Ram he had sexual powers that linked him with the propagation of the royalty and the fertility of the land.

As a Ram, he was believed to have been father to all the royal pharaohs, and according to Frazer, the virgin queens of Egypt would go to the temple of Ammon (another of his names) and through “divine procreation” become pregnant, with no physical signs of having been with a mortal man.”

Amen, you are so warm,

hide me in your fleece,
crop me up with the new-grass;

let your teeth devour me,
let me be warm in your belly,

the sun-disk,
the re-born Sun.

[Walls, s22]

Amen is an ecstatic exclamation, a tribute of thanks, and an uncovering of the secret sacred ritual behind a virgin's ability to conceive, dating back 3000 years before the birth of Christ.

In the darkest sanctum of Ammon's temple, somewhere in the depths of his palimpsest city, the god becomes man for one heavenly night, and the priests spread the seed of the royal lineage.

The seed that is the body of a god disseminated throughout the land is best remembered in the myth of Isis and Osiris.

They too have arrived in war-torn London, up-rised from the tombs at Karnak where they are guardians of the dead.

Like myths whose stories are splintered through time, within the name Isis is the dispersion of the sources of a name.

She is called "the many named," "the thousand-named," and "the myriad named."

She also has names which specifically link her with the cycles of vegetation:

"Creatress of great things," "Lady of Bread," and "Lady of Abundance."

As time and politics progressed, the image of Isis became that of a tender mother, a queen both of nature and moral purity.

Isis then began to be called “the Virgin Mary,” because, according to Frazer, “in the pictures and statues of Isis suckling her son Horus, [Christians] perceived the prototypes of the Virgin Mary and her Child.”

With “Mary” Isis is replaced, and her name becomes solidified into one, final story.

now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame

under, till marah-mar
are melted, fuse and join

and change and alter,
mer, mere, mere, mater, Maia, Mary,

Star of the Sea,
Mother.

[*Tribute to the Angels*, s8]

Here is an alchemical stew of names, solidifying into the most fundamental name remembered: Mother.

But the rebellion has begun, and Mother is a reluctant savior.

A mirror breaks where Mother admires her wholeness, and in the splinters the counterparts emerge: Venus, Aphrodite, Astarte.

Although originating in different parts of the ancient world, all have traces of the story of Isis and Osiris.

All three goddesses have a lover/brother who died, and in their sorrow, each is depicted holding their lifeless mates across their laps, just as the Virgin Mary is depicted lamenting the dead body of her son.

As the story goes, with the help of the goddesses, the lifeless god is resurrected.

When he ascends, the wintered earth is once again ready for the birth of spring, when crops ascend from their seedling underworld.

The ascension of the god into heaven is the erection of the corn husk.

We are part of it;
we admit transubstantiation

not God merely in bread
but God in the other-half of the tree

that looked dead—
did I bow my head?

[*Tribute*, s23]

No story is sacred and fixed in time, or stone.

H.D. shatters the birth of Christ, and with him Mary, into the ancient agricultural gods from which their stories originated.

Sirius:
what mystery is this?

you are seed,
corn near the sand,
enclosed in black-lead,
ploughed land.

[*Walls*, s41]

This image of shattering the One into multiple counterparts is partially a metaphor for war's destruction of cities—but the palimpsest does not stop there.

The multiple counterparts themselves—Osiris, Adonis and Christ, were shattered when their bodies were sacrificed for the land.

To lament the death of Adonis—and the hard winters endured because of his curse of having to live half the year with Persephone in the underworld—Syrian women used baskets to plant rootless vegetables and grains.

These grew for eight days, and when the vegetables were rotten the women threw the baskets, along with images of Adonis, into the sea.

“This is my body, given up for you,” the god called Christ proclaims, and to mourn his death his churches are covered in black, his image is removed, and his believers ponder their sins.

But the redemption of sins will do no good to those whose lives and land are shattered by war.

H.D. is Isis in her sorrow who helps with the gods’ resurrection; she tries to wake them, pulling at them by the letter.

Osiris equates O-sir-is or O-Sire-is

Osiris,
the star Sirius

relates resurrection myth
and resurrection reality

through the ages;

[*Walls*, s40]

Myth and reality are for a brief moment united by the transformation of names that occurs from Osiris to Sirius, from a mutilated god who was buried in different parts of the land to the star of his lover, Isis, appearing in the sky to signify his resurrection at the summer solstice.

The palimpsest works through *Trilogy* not only to revise history and put time back together through myths, but to piece together the bodies of the gods themselves.

The star Sirius is transformed into a new god/ess envisioned by H.D.: the Sire, who is partly Isis, and who in he/r wholeness is open to receive questions:

O, Sire, is this the waste?
unbelievably,

sand glistens like ice,
cold, cold;

drawn to the temple gate, O, Sire,
is this union at last?

[*Walls*, s42]

Fused together in new patterns and combinations, myths provide resources of potential re-creations.

The final poem of the *Trilogy*, “The Flowering of the Rod,” is written more as a story than the previous two sections.

It ends with gifts being given in celebration of a birth that bears familiar traces to the birth at Bethlehem.

The god divided into pieces will not help a psyche that is in need of restoration.

From the splintered deities of the poem to the revision of a familiar story, *Trilogy* uses the mythmaking devices of antiquity—the solidification of the Many into the One—to construct a sacred re-birth that is H.D.’s own vision for the resurrections or restorations that must take place, both on the land, and in the human psyche, both naturally and spiritually.

No one will know exactly how it came about,
but we are permitted to wonder

if it had possibly something to do
with the vow he had made—

well, it wasn't exactly a vow,
an idea, a wish, a whim, a premonition perhaps,

that premonition we all know,
this has happened before somewhere else,

or *this will happen again—where? when?*

[*The Flowering Of The Rod*, s41]

Although the shift from the Many to the One is a political scheme that facilitates the ruling of priests and kings, H.D. leaves open the possibility of a future up-rise.

The condensing of the chaos of Karnak into the psychological wholeness of a reborn psyche is not the end of her story.

There are as many meanings emanating from *Trilogy* as there are pieces of myths, occult references, and biblical prophecies scattered throughout time.

Each one proclaims its presence in the here and now, which is at the same time *the there* and *the before*—but each is only one structure of the palimpsest-city that is changes from rupture to rupture.

There is more than time in eternity.

To H.D., war-torn London is Egypt in its winter, needing the vegetation deities to return from Karnak and play out their own obliteration.

Over and over again.

So that fragmented people always remember, though their frames and their spirits are broken to forget.