
Post-War Border Crossings: H.D.'s Healing Imagination

Vivian Delchamps*¹

¹UCLA – United States

Abstract

American expatriate poet Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) crossed gendered, poetic, and national borders while she wrote in Europe from 1911 to 1961. Much like its author, H.D.'s poetry is voracious in its wayfaring, traversing the landscapes of Greek myth, Japanese haiku, and French symbolisme. H.D. was openly bisexual, and she challenged traditional views of femininity; furthermore, she provided a healing alternative to the objectification of women by centering her poetry on female subjects. After the World Wars ended, H.D. used her writing to confront the pain felt by a world wrecked by trauma. In my essay, I argue that H.D. attempts to soothe that pain by crossing the border between bodily, corporeal experiences and intangible, imagined ones. H.D.'s (often female) narrators navigate bodied and un-bodied states of being, indulging in the pleasures of physical experience while yet transcending corporeality in order to escape from human agony. Drawing from my work in disability studies, I discuss H.D.'s experiences with illness, injury, anxiety, and childbirth, and suggest that H.D. uproots pain and re-centers it in her mythologized imagination, offering a remedy to the violence of both international war and individual suffering. At the SSAWW conference, I hope to be a part of any panel that discusses poetry, Modernism, disability studies, the body, or trauma. While contributing to conversations about these topics, I will ask: after great pain, how do women use writing to heal and reconcile? How did crossing international and gendered borders influence H.D.'s matriarchal, mythologized poetic healing?

*Speaker