

THE MYSTERY UNVEILED: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF H.D.'S "MORAVIAN" NOVEL

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Another twentieth-century war began as this essay was being written, a reminder of the ambivalent responses, fears and uncertainties—even gut-level terrors—which H.D. felt during war. I doubted this project momentarily: is it helpful in this context to try to explain the value of a little-known, semi-published, hard-to-read novel by H.D.? One recalls that, during the London blitz of World War II, she had been criticized because poetry-writing seems useless in wartime:

But we fight for life,
we fight, they say, for breath,

so what good are your scribblings?

She answered:

this—we take them with us
beyond death. (CP 518)

The necessity to go “beyond death,” especially death in war, and to create a vision of peace and unity is the prime motive of H.D.’s spiritual search and of her writing late in life. *The Mystery*, written in 1950-51, shows that the roots of this vision lie in her Moravian Christian background; and in this context the study of *The Mystery* has considerable value. Although it cannot be argued that *The Mystery* is a readable novel, it is nevertheless a sourcebook of information about H.D.’s spiritual syncretism and the evolution of her literary concerns. She intended it as a meditation on spiritual life and as a contribution to “world unity without war,” in a phrase used in the novel to express the dream of Count Zinzendorf, founder of the Moravian Church, who is its ultimate and

hidden hero. One might call this book *Tribute to Zinzendorf*.

The Mystery is, however, an almost unknown work. Apart from scholars with access to the Beinecke manuscript, readers have available only those portions of it published in 1976 by Enitharmon Press, London, in an edition by Eric W. White titled *Images of H.D./ from The Mystery*. White, who had corresponded with H.D. since 1931, received from her, early in 1961, “a typewritten copy of an unpublished historical novella, set in Prague, which she had written about Count von Zinzendorf and other Moravian characters, called *The Mystery*” (M 28). She sent it in answer to “a long enthusiastic letter describing my Moravian investigations” which White wrote to her during a visit to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, founded by Moravian Church members (very few were *ethnically* Moravian) in the eighteenth century. After White read *The Mystery*, he said that he felt “somewhat baffled by the outpouring of strange names, memories and allusions that crossed and crisscrossed each other, forming a mysterious dense cocoon” (M 28).

White’s allusion to the cocoon imagery of *Trilogy* is deliberate; he intuited a rich psyche concealed here, connected with the vision of resurrection in H.D.’s wartime poems. And there are riches in these Moravian materials, in which H.D. was heavily invested, as I found while researching and annotating the full 140-page typescript. The study was rewarding because it revealed those aspects of Moravianism which attracted H.D. and her interpretation of them; the role that names play in her concept of “reincarnation”; and the evolution of the beneficent mother-figure from the actual Helen Wolle to transcendent Helen of *Helen in Egypt*.

But the reader of *The Mystery* is confronted by a difficult problem: one needs prior knowledge of the facts of Moravian history so that H.D.’s interpretations of them will make sense, but the text itself presents only elliptical and condensed references to these facts, and hence the interpretation is uncertain. This problem arose because H.D. knew the facts intimately, having recorded them in the 94-page set of “Notes” to *The Gift*. While writing that memoir, reliving her peaceful Bethlehem childhood as specific antidote to her war-terror, she read Moravian history, especially Joseph Mortimer Levering’s *History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1741-1893* (1903), and copied passages into these “Notes,” intended to be published with the original full-length version of *The Gift*. If readers had the prior context of the full-length *Gift* with “Notes,” *The Mystery* would be somewhat more accessible.¹

Still, a knowledge of the facts of Moravian history is not enough; one has to understand their significance for H.D. Fortunately help for this understanding comes from

her own biographical and aesthetic self-analysis in *H.D. by Delia Alton*, written in 1949-50 and cataloged under the title "Notes on Recent Writing" until its publication in the H.D. centennial issue of *The Iowa Review*. "Delia Alton," H.D.'s mediumistic self who received messages via table-tipping from dead RAF pilots during World War II, also signs the title page of *The Mystery*. These multiple selves as author foreshadow the shifting identities of the "twinned" central characters of *The Mystery*, Elizabeth de Watteville and Henry Dohna, who historically were cousins, Zinzendorf's grandchildren. In H.D.'s mythic imagination Elizabeth and Henry become manifestations of Isis and Osiris. In *H.D. by Delia Alton*, the myth of Isis' search for the scattered limbs of Osiris is explicitly stated as the dominant theme in H.D.'s prose, and, as Adalaide Morris emphasizes in her introduction, this quest is a means by which H.D. can re-assemble the fragments of her own writing into a unified whole: "The many women in her work 'are of course, they all are, the same woman,' avatars of Isis 'who are individually seeking, as one woman, fragments of the Eternal Lover.'" H.D. sees her principal project as redeeming "not so much the fragments of Osiris, as of his sister, twin or double, the drowned or submerged Isis."³ She is re-memorizing, re-attaching the limbs of herself, getting well after the 1946 crisis in which Lord Dowding declared that her spirit voices from "beyond" were false and thus impugned her status as mystic and "initiate."

In *The Mystery*, H.D. seems not only to identify herself with Isis, in the Elizabeth figure, but with Osiris as well. Osiris is the twin-brother who, in the Henry Dohna figure, has the signature initials "H.D.," and Osiris is the lover, as is suggested in the third central character in the novel, Louis Saint-Germain, who, like the medieval knight-troubadour of Provence, remnant of De Rougemont's "lost church of Love," is also a questor. Osiris for H.D. is embarked on the same quest as Isis; he too seeks an ideal lover who is the bearer and exemplar of a higher spirituality. In Morris's words: "The search for the 'Eternal Lover' is the visionary quest for an idea or an ideal, a messenger or visitor from another realm of consciousness, another field of vision or of knowledge."⁴ The question may well be asked: why does H.D. emphasize a male spiritual seeker at this point, when valorization of the authentic female initiate is of such importance?

I suggest that the time had come for H.D. to investigate and restore the father-figure as she had previously investigated the mother. That reconstructed father now is not Freud but Zinzendorf, who was actually the "founder of a new religion," that aspiration which Freud attributed to H.D. (TF 37) She must also bring masculine patriarchal authority into herself to recover from Lord Dowding's denial of her spiritual authenticity. She cannot deny his spiritual authority any more than she can deny the authority of her

own experience; she knows she has had “visitations”—for example, the “super-normal” apparition of the Man on the Boat. Whose claim to authentic psychic powers is to be believed?

In view of this dilemma her choice of Louis Saint-Germain as a central character in *The Mystery* is relevant. The issue of true and false claims to magical and psychic powers is passionately discussed by Eliphas Lévi in his *History of Magic* (1913), a volume from which she took much information verbatim to create her character Saint-Germain. The historical Louis Saint-Germain was a magician of the eighteenth century called “Der Wundermann” and “The Deathless.” Legends abounded concerning his immortality and his capacity to appear in two places at once, and nineteenth-century theosophy made him one of their Twelve Ascended Masters.

H.D. places Saint-Germain in a crisis of mental and physical breakdown, similar to her own, in which he must release himself from two kinds of false religious authority: the charlatanism of Cagliostro and the institutional politics of Cardinal deRohan, both historical personages redesigned to fit into H.D.’s occultist and mythologized vision of history. Saint-Germain experiences an uncertainty like that of H.D. herself, which is resolved through his encounters with the Moravians H(enry) D(ohna) and Elizabeth, who act as annunciators of the “visitation,” from a higher spiritual realm, of Zinzendorf himself. Perhaps the apparition of Zinzendorf is a dream or a wine-induced hallucination, but whatever the source, he is “real” to Saint-Germain, who addresses Zinzendorf’s occult presence throughout the last chapter of the novel.

A legend that Zinzendorf had been seen at Schweinitz when he was supposedly in residence at Dresden connects him with Saint-Germain’s capacity for bi-location and gives rise to the plot centered on the “Visitor.” H.D. says:

It is a mystery not uncommon to folk and fairytales, the mystery of the appearance of a stranger or a near-stranger at a time and in a place where he could not possibly have been. “It could happen at any time, but unless you were aware of its happening, it wasn’t the Visitor”. . . . So St. Germain, in his role of Brother Antonius muses in the great Cathedral. . . . (HDDA 202)

Zinzendorf’s mystical character is attested to by stories of his power—for instance, that the Indians accepted him as one sent by “Manito,”⁵ the Great Spirit—stories whose spiritual light plays over the Bethlehem of H.D.’s memory. This mystical character

conveyed through remembered stories has continuity with writing preceding *The Mystery*. The stories of H.D.'s grandmother had the same quality, and, as H.D. recalls them, she feels that in writing *The Gift* (in 1941-42) she "actually returns to that world" (HDDA 192). She doesn't simply remember, but she re-lives her memories; for her they are "reincarnations." She feels in "intimate communion or communication" (195) with persons in the past, a sense she got from her conversation with the dead RAF pilots. Thus she feels that her devotion to the legend of the circle of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris arouses in her a sense of similarities to her own life: "something of my . . . first urge toward expression in art finds a parallel in the life of Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall" (194). She is "reincarnating" by writing *The White Rose and the Red* in 1948, also having been drawn to Siddall because of the similarity of her name to H.D.'s Moravian grandmother's name: Elizabeth Seidel. Name-linkage for H.D. is substantive, not arbitrary; it is *logos*, word made flesh; thus names are vehicles for "reincarnations" or for the "sense of continuity" which H.D. says "renewed my faith at the end of the war-years" (HDDA 195). The name Elizabeth creates a conduit for another "reincarnation."

As H.D. was coming to the end of writing Elizabeth Siddall's story, the name connection led her "to live or to 'see' another story," set in the eighteenth century and "fulfilling a latent ambition" to make use of the notes she had made while writing *The Gift*:

I had become very devoted to the Zinzendorf legend and suddenly one of his grand-daughters, another Elizabeth, steps as it were, out of history to take the place of the (as yet) vaguely questing Elizabeth Siddall I have a title for the new story. It is called *The Mystery*. (HDDA 200)

Thus H.D. blends her artist self with her Moravian grandmother, whom she called "Mamalie," and who speaks in "'The Secret,' the key-chapter of *The Gift*" (196), of something which the early Moravian Church had but later lost—a special Spirit that some of the Crusaders worshipped, a *plan* which "didn't mean just *plan* or even company, but referred to some secret society or organization."⁶ Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, she says, was "one of a number of Moravian settlements, having to do with a mysterious *Plan* of 'peace on earth'" (HDDA 188). The third chapter of *The Mystery* (the first printed by Eric White) opens with Henry Dohna reading old documents and recalling a conversation with Goethe in which he described Zinzendorf's non-political "*Plan* . . . to form a World

State of the Lord's Watch" (M 33).

The first chapter of *The Mystery* begins with Saint-Germain, however, who accidentally meets Elizabeth in the Cathedral of St. Wenceslas. He intuits her spiritual power as the cathedral's heavy doors swing open the wrong way for her. Elizabeth plainly is an "initiate," although unconscious of it. At the historical moment when all Europe is aware that the French Revolution is about to erupt, Elizabeth and Henry are in Prague to do what H.D. herself did; they go through old books and papers to find out more about the lost secret *Plan* of the Moravian Church for worldwide peace. (H.D.'s lack of normal exposition makes additional problems for the reader; the exact setting of events in the novel—December 1788—is not made clear until midway in chapter IX).

Saint-Germain's first name, Louis, is one of Zinzendorf's names as well, indicating a spiritual linkage to the Moravians of which the French Catholic aristocrat is at first unaware. But he is signalled that he is heading in the wrong direction spiritually when he undergoes a "supernormal" experience in which the Cathedral "veers round," its left side appearing as its right side, much like H.D.'s mystical meeting of The Man on the Boat, which she describes in *Tribute to Freud* (156-58). This experience comes after Louis, disguised as Brother Antonius, has witnessed a magical extinction of candles in the cathedral, although there is no wind. He associates this magic with Elizabeth because the cathedral doors have blown open the wrong way for her. He intuits that a supernatural Visitor is near, bringing a message. "The Cathedral is the Dream," says H.D. in *HDDA* (204), directly connecting this sacred space with her conception that unconscious mind and eternal spirit are co-terminous, equally accessible to initiates of both sexes but in particularly close connection with the feminine principle.

The veering-around of the Cathedral is the beginning of grave illness for Louis. Henry Dohna visits the sick man who greets him as "brother"; Elizabeth then visits Louis as Sister Elizabeth in her Moravian sister's cap, the kind H.D. had seen her grandmother wear. In his semi-delirium he sees her as Our Lady, in much the same multi-layered image as that of the dream-Lady, Mary/Isis, of *Tribute to the Angels*. During her visits she tells him stories of Bethlehem which emphasize the American Indians' recognition of Zinzendorf as a highly developed spiritual being—for example, that the warrior chiefs of the Six Nations gave him a belt of wampum as a token of peace for use as a safe-conduct through their territories. She treats Saint-Germain's fever with medicinal herbs, Indian remedies taught to Moravian women, who also used them when Bethlehem became a hospital for General Washington's wounded after the battle of Brandywine in the American Revolution.

These stories, told or alluded to elliptically in *The Mystery*, are quoted at greater length in the “Notes” to *The Gift*. What H.D. is “devoted” to in the “Zinzendorf legend,” then, would appear in part to be his non-sectarianism and respect for non-white races. His mysticism, his generous vision and “heart religion,” uncharacteristic of the sectarian eighteenth century, reinforce the fact that the Moravian Church is the “old church” of Bohemia, the pre-Reformation church, unseparated from the Church of Rome, bridging the schism between Protestantism and Catholicism. For H.D. the Moravian Church propagates a universal eternal spirituality transcending human divisions—competing sects, warring nations, the personal opposition of male versus female.

In the final chapter of the novel, Louis speaks with the supernatural manifestation of Zinzendorf, who materializes immediately after the departure of Elizabeth and Henry. He then realizes that his mission is to return to his true identity and to an act of self-sacrifice. He will go back to France as *chevalier*, keeping a troubadour’s faith with his Queen by leading the Swiss Guard in defense of the royal palace. He will die in the act, presumably, because history records that revolutionaries slaughtered the Swiss Guard, who loyally refused to give up their posts of defense of the palace even after the King and Queen had fled. It is this loyalty to a transcendent love, in which the erotic and the spiritual are inseparable and pure, which H.D. admires—the courtly lover’s fealty to his *midons* which is the chivalric ideal, and to which *The Mystery*, “my last romance” (HDDA 202), pays tribute.

But the failure of love to be ideal is a more common theme in H.D.’s prose. Her novel plots persistently involve the Isis-Osiris couple in painful love-triangles in a pattern resembling Aldington’s early betrayal of H.D. in his affair with Dorothy Yorke. H.D.’s mythicizing of these triangles in fictional form has always seemed to constitute a therapy; here it is also a redemption. For *The Mystery* she finds another love-triangle in the Zinzendorf legend. The Count as a young man had fallen in love with his cousin, Theodora de Castell; but, discovering that his best friend, Henry Count Reuss, was also in love with her, he renounced his engagement plans. Henry married Theodora and Zinzendorf married Henry’s sister, Erdmuth Dorothea von Reuss. The story is retold in chapter two of *The Mystery* by Elizabeth, who expresses her sense of affinity with Theodora but also with her grandmother Erdmuth. The passage recalls Mamalie in *The Gift* and adumbrates the blended mother/lover Thetis/Helen figure in *Helen in Egypt*.

Saint-Germain’s final speech to the mystical presence of Zinzendorf also proclaims a spiritual union as well as the ultimate significance of Moravian doctrine for H.D.:

I would only say that your Mysticism is naturally repulsive to men, who would at all costs elevate the Father above all, and above all, above the Mother. Your poem to that effect—I will not quote it—was enough to burn you at the stake, like that John Huss . . .

The poem is Zinzendorf's 1896th hymn; lines from it were copied by H.D. in her "Zinzendorf Notebook": "God, thou mother of the whole church, eternal wife of God the Father."⁷

Zinzendorf's mystical view of divine love as incorporating both the feminine and masculine principles, symbolized also by the Isis-Osiris union in Egyptian myth, allows H.D. to understand her own incorporation of both the mother and the father. Thus she accomplishes her spiritual goals of this period. She has banished self-doubt, ended her "romantic thralldom" to Dowding and thereby freed herself from dominance by male spiritual authority, while absorbing those insights of value given her by her male mentors, including a straightforward confidence in empirical observation and intellectual inquiry. H.D. regards her scientist father, her Moravian grandfather, and Freud as palimpsestic "reincarnations" associated with Zinzendorf, with Bethlehem, and with "a legend of a new way of life, a Brotherhood, dedicated to peace and universal understanding" (HDDA 189).

In October 1951, after sending the completed text of *The Mystery* to Norman Holmes Pearson, she wrote him: "I wanted you to tell me if you feel it is finished? I do. And FINIS too, to a whole processus or lifetime of experience."⁸ She has fully assimilated her Moravian heritage. It has restored her sanity and she need no longer be preoccupied by it. Now in possession of spiritual autonomy, she is free to begin her recuperation of archetypal empowered woman in the Helen of *Helen in Egypt*: "She herself is the writing."

War in the Persian Gulf is coming to an end as I write. Its cease-fire parallels the "All Clear" which ends *The Gift* and the FINIS to this study of *The Mystery*. Relief from war-terror, even if temporary or inconclusive, is a great redemption, having the capacity to restore our minds to pursuit of that peaceful wholeness which is H.D.'s true and still-to-be-realized vision.

NOTES

1. I am at work on preparing this original version, which will acknowledge fully the previously published portions. The complete text of Chapter One, "Dark Room," with H.D.'s notes, appears in *Montemora* 8 (1981): 57-72; Chapter Two, "Fortune Teller," missing entirely from the New Directions edition, appears in *The Iowa Review* 16:3 (Fall 1986): 14-41, with commentary by Adalaide Morris; and Chapter Three, "The Dream," appears in *Contemporary Literature* 10:3 (1969): 605-26. Other partial cuts in the New Directions edition of *The Gift* are described in "A Note on the State of H.D.'s *The Gift*" by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Sulfur* 9 (1984): 178-82. I wish to thank the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, for permission to quote unpublished materials from *The Mystery* and *The Gift* by H.D.
2. Adalaide Morris, "H.D.'s 'H.D. by Delia Alton,'" *The Iowa Review* 16.3 (1986): 177.
3. Morris 182.
4. Morris 177.
5. Jane Augustine, "The Mystery: H.D.'s Unpublished Moravian Novel Edited and Annotated," Ph.D. dissertation (1988) 316, n.17; 317, n.18.
6. H.D., "The Gift," original typescript, first draft, chap. 5, p. 12. The New Directions edition of *The Gift* cut the allusions to the "Plan," a Zinzendorfian idea reinterpreted by H.D.
7. Augustine 373, n.40.
8. The author wishes to thank the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, for permission to quote from the H.D.-Pearson correspondence.