Inbetween Myth and Writing One's Self: Woolf, H.D. and Bryher on Modernism, Myth and Biographical Writing

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Abstract: In this essay I would like to analyse biographical writing by three female modernist writers: H.D.'s HERmione, Bryher's A Heart to Artemis, and Virginia Woolf's Orlando. How do these biographic novels draw on mythology to constitute the writing woman (of modernism)? At first, I would like to analyse these novels with regard to the question of how they try to articulate a biography of a female writer against the lack of historical models. Here, I would like to add readings of Virginia Woolfs A Room of One's Own, as a take on the issue of missing cultural history of female writing. Secondly, the implementation of mythology in these texts will be analysed. Here I would like to add readings of H.D.'s Helen in Egypt, as a take on the issue of missing literary and cultural representation of women by women. Lastly, I would like to establish how these female authors are writing themselves in relation to the man-centred artistic world of their time. Here I would like to add reading of Gertrude Stein's Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, as a take on the competition of female writers with their male counterparts at their time.

Keywords: Pygmalion, Woolf, H.D., Bryher, Künstlerroman

> "Dealing with terms of antiquity became a sort of ritual. – It was all out of reality. I mean reality was out of it precisely." (H.D. 1981, 211)

In the beginning of the twentieth century, wherever female writers would direct their intellectual interest, they would be surrounded by patriarchal culture: in literary scholarship, Hellenism and modernism alike. Neither literary history, which would only provide what Diana Collecott calls "paternal or fraternal inheritance" (Collecott 1999, 221), nor classical scholarship, institutionalized as most suitable to "young men aspiring to power" (Hoberman 1997, 23), nor modernism, which, in the words of Benstock, was a "masculine, heterosexual phenomenon that excluded those who did not share the mores of its dominant culture" (Benstock 2021,

312) offered female writers an intellectual space to call home. Collecott comes to the conclusion that all of these three spheres, entangled as they are, place female writers in an "uncomfortable and contradictory" position, against "a misogynist tradition" anchored in all of these spheres (Collecott 1999, 113).

Being few and often isolated, female writers are left with the constant work of subversion of patriarchal domination, both inside the institutions and the aesthetic structures and historical and imaginative resources, within their life and writing. In the following, I will argue that Virginia Woolf, H.D. and Annie Winifred Ellerman ("Bryher")[1] inscribe themselves in a counter-discourse of female creativity within their biographical writings. First, Woolf's, H.D's and Ellerman's appropriation of imaginative spaces within and beyond history as resources for their literary legacy will be discussed. Secondly, readings of their biographical works *Orlando*, *HERmione*, and *The Heart to Artemis* as *Künstlerroman* will be provided. Lastly, these texts are read for their comments on modernism and male peer writers.

Pre-history

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf "imagine[s]" the destiny of Shakespeare's equally talented sister Judith, "since facts are so hard to come by" (Woolf 2015, 35). Imagining Judith, Virginia Woolf achieves two things at once: on the one hand, she shows the historical and social impossibilities for women to become writers and on the other hand, she helps herself by creating a literary predecessor that is female and, to some extend, legendary. Judith Shakespeare becomes, by imagination, a *potential* literary ancestor of Woolf. Potential ancestors, hidden female authors, are read in the history of literature as blank spaces:

> When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even

1 Annie Winifred Ellerman called herself Bryher, inspired by her favourite of the Scilly Isles: "Some years later I took the name under Deep Poll. And under English law it is incorrect to speak of it as a pseudonym. My passport is issued to me under that name and no legal document is valid that I sign in any other way" (Bryher 2006, 224). To avoid confusion, in this paper the author herself is called Ellerman, and the artistic persona created as protagonist in the memoir *The Heart to Artemis* will be called Bryher. This helps to distinguish Ellerman as author and Bryher as artist as she is created in the biography.

> of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet. (36)

In Woolf's mind, these lost novelists and suppressed poets, "mute and inglorious" (36), come together as a collective voice: Anon. Woolf is fascinated by Anon as a collective figure, by anonymity and "the desire to be veiled" that has been inscribed in women's stories for ages. Texts signed by Anon are proofs of female writing in history, although their authors not ought to exist as authors. These traces of collective impossibilities of writing are the counter concept that Woolf needs to undermine literary history dominated by the patriarchal principle. The potential female artist against a history of impossibilities becomes Anon, "who wrote so many poems without signing them" (37). Playing with the non-existent, the forbidden and the hidden, Woolf choses a maternal inheritance line. According to Schwartz, Woolf aims to "establish the mother as the repository of memory and as the source of poetic inspiration" (Schwartz 1991, 721) by giving her the central and vital function in the inspirational process.

H.D.'s novel *HERmione*, posthumously published in 1981, revolves around the question of artistic and erotic awakening, both "inseparable" from each other (Friedman 1990, 84). Written in an associative style, the text imitates psychoanalytic introspection, investigating the protagonist's becoming of an artist and operating with Freudian terms and ideas. With regard to other *Künstlerromane* by fellow modernist writers like Joyce (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) and Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers*), Friedman has shown how Joyce's and Lawrence's protagonists struggle with the oedipal desire for their mother, which results, as the artists becomes himself, in a split desire for a muse of flesh and a muse of love (Friedman 1990, 105). The Freudian concept of oedipal desire serves as a foundation for the establishment of dynamic conflicts in the becoming of the artist, which vitalizes his creativity: being torn in between body and mind, in between two muses, the male artist evolves his artwork.

Woolf's Orlando of the eighteenth century comments satirically on how the literary excellence and the sexual desire of the male genius-artist are thought as mutual. In Orlando's words a genius rather "resembles the lighthouse in its working", which, if more "capricious", "may flash six or seven beams in quick succession (as Mr Pope did that last night) and then lapse into darkness for a year or for ever" (Woolf 2018, 190). Virility and creativity are withdrawn their pathos and ridiculed.

In comparison to Woolf's novel, Friedman argues that *HERmione* tries to de-construct this Freudian male-centred reading of the heterosexual poet-muse relationship (105). The Freudian conflict is shifted towards the protagonist's brother's relationship. Hermione feels replaced by Minnie, her sister-in-law, who calls Hermione's parents mother and father, which feels to her as a "two-edge theft" (H.D. 1981, 16). The Freudian desire for the mother, expressed by Joyce and Lawrence, is dealt with in another way in this text: the protagonist's mother Eugenia becomes not a source of desire but rather a source of artistic ethics.

When being critiqued by George for her own writings, Hermione turns to her mother's paintings on the wall, saying: "Mama should have given me watercolours. I would rather paint. I wish I could have painted […] like Eugenia" (148). Hermione sees her mother as an artist, whereas George cannot find any aesthetic value in these paintings: "'You must see how she loved it.' 'Love doesn't make good art, Hermione.'" (149). What she finds in her mother's paintings is a poetic of love, as "[l]ove is writing" (149). As Hermione learns to love first George and then Fayne, she learns to write. Love and erotic desire are not, like in Joyce or Lawrence, split.

At the end of the novel, after being destroyed by her damaged relationship to both George and Fayne, Hermione is offered the opportunity to travel to Europe as company of Jimmy Ferrand's mother Mim. Jimmy Ferrand's mother "want[s] someone" and "must have someone for the winter" to accompany her (233). After a heterosexual and a homosexual relationship, it is eventually a mother-daughter relationship that gives Hermione the chance to recover her personhood, of becoming "someone" again. By seeing the mother as a model for creation, and finding peace with it as possible closure provided by the novel, H.D. breaks with the oedipal poet-muse hierarchies exemplified by her contemporaries Joyce and Lawrence. Thereby, Hermione is able to appropriate the poetics of desire on her own terms.

The interest taken by Woolf, H.D., and Ellerman in Freud leads also to what lies beyond the oedipal, the classical, beyond myth itself. As Schwarz points out, the pre-oedipal phase, framed by Freud in archaeological terms as a "Minoan-Maycenaen civilization behind that of Greece" (quoted in Schwartz 1991, 726), parallels Woolf's depiction of "Anon's pilgrimages" in the history not yet uncovered or always to be hidden (726). Beyond the limits of known history, a space opens up that offers possibilities for appropriation. Anchoring imagined

female ancestry in these pre-historical spaces allows (female) writers to position themselves in a counter-tradition to institutionalized history. According to Schwartz, both Freud and Woolf posit a "prehistoric and matriarchal world", which "underlies and influences the patriarchal civilization of Oedipal history" (727). Moreover, the knowledge of the underlying history that has always paralleled known history re-appears in Woolf's conceptualization of potential, but supressed, female authors.

Reflecting this notion of matriarchy as counter-culture provides a richer reading of the novels *HERmione* and *The Heart to Artemis*. Guiheneuf describes this pre-historcial and 'other' Greece that H.D. and Ellerman appropriated as an aesthetic for their work as archaic, sapphic, and ionic (Guiheneuf 2013, 310); thus, as essentially non-heteronormative and non-western. Within the associative network of her novel *HERmione*, H.D. uses archaic Greece to connotate difference and subversion of paternal artistic legacy. Establishing her mother as the figure of the artist, she distinguishes a maternal from a paternal line by associating them with different aesthetics: "Eugenia was not Hellenistic, she was Eleusinian. Eugenia is Eleusinian. My father is Athenian" (H.D. 1981, 31). "Eugenia" and "Eleusinian" are paralleled by their sound and typography. In the character of Eugenia, two lines of inheritance come together: the non-oedipal mother as artist, and the maternal line of archaic culture. H.D.'s protagonist becomes aware of this legacy as legitimation for her status as a female artist.

By developing intensive relationships with both George and Fayne, Hermione gains confidence of how she understands herself as an artist. In an intimate moment, Fayne calls Hermione a "prophetess shrieking before Olympus". Immediately, Hermione corrects her: it is Delphi that she feels drawn to (144). Later, she elaborates:

> Delphi, Olympus were states as different, as exact as exactly to be predicted as the words, the reaction of a Frenchman, of and Italian, of a South American. Olympus and Delphi and Dodona were state of mind, exactly to be predicted… (213)

Delphi and Olympus are imagined places of belonging that influence the way of thinking, being, and, as most important for H.D., the way of creating. As H.D. refigures them in the novel, these imaginary places offer an origin to the artist who is willing to align with it. The pre-apollonian Delphi represents archaic

matriarchy, a counter concept to patriarchal Olympus. Being with Fayne is depicted as an intense and erotically charged experience of prophecy at the heart of the oracle, when "prophetess face[s] prophetess over tea plates scattered and two teacups making Delphic pattern on worn carpet" (146). As prophetesses, they are mediums, Delphi figuring a distant but still intense source of truth. With Delphi as their source of inspiration, both overcome the abusive subject/object division of muse and poet.

By contrast, Ellerman uses the notion of archaic matriarchy and pre-history to re-write her own personhood. As Fedor analysed, Ellerman has used matriarchal Greece as a fictional possibility to queer historic characters in her first historical novel *Gate to Sea* from 1958 (Fedor 2013, 11). In her memoir, *The Heart to Artemis*, Ellerman's fictional H.D. and Bryher discuss the dichotomy of archaic and Hellenistic Greece as an aesthetic concept. In a conversation, Bryher appropriates this opposition to position herself in line with archaic inheritance and to consequently distinguish herself from her own time:

> I want to be as wild as possible. Not Athenian. I should never have had the citizenship anyhow. I belong to the islands and the East […] Athens is so cold and balanced. (Bryher, 225)

Bryher's claim is revealed as pathetic, as the fictional H.D. mocks her, asking "Why so serious about it?" (225). While Ellerman's H.D. distinguishes between "two forms of art" (225), Bryher is less concerned with art, but with individual freedom, a way of life.

Throughout the memoirs, Bryher identifies herself with mythological figures, lives "through and with the myths" (58). Mythological and historical figures, male and female, become what she feels to be her ancestors, by the way they fight, live, and wander. She describes herself as a "follower of Hannibal, not of Rome" (348), finds herself inspired by Penthesilea and Achilles alike (58), and finally, devotes herself to Artemis (111).

While Doolittle's poetological search for ancestry is clearly concerned with a Greece composed of the margins, both historically and geographically, Ellerman's concept of the non-Athenian antiquity is composed of more than Greece itself. Bryher focusses on the East as collective term for the Arabic, the Anatolic, and the North-African territories and cultures. Travelling these places as a child, her memory is rich of impressions. Visiting the city of Cairo, her lived experience

and her imagination of imperial Rome overlap (68). Even after having turned her back on the Arabian world "the East still dominated [her] imagination" (151).

Even though the "myths of childhood had faded", Bryher is constantly merging historical imagination and experience of place: when she arrives in Corfu, now twenty years old, she feels "that the island was alive, antiquity was there and I was not looking at it through a veil because it was also intensely modern" (190). Bryher's mind is a palimpsest: while re-living antiquity, she inscribes herself in it, as "to write of things was to become part of them" (128). To be free from convention, which is what Bryher desires the most, is felt as truly archaic and at the same time what she aspires to is to be "intensely modern". Speaking with Woolf, the veil that has hidden female writers in history is lifted in Bryher's vision, when pre-history and modernism touch.

All three authors have appropriated antiquity and maternal legacy in terms of a counter-culture in order to subvert literary history (Woolf), invalidate oedipian concepts of creativity (H.D.) and appropriate the pre-historic to a modernism in one's own terms (Ellerman).

Pygmalion

According to Schwartz, "convention has dictated that the poet muse relationship is heterosexually charged" (Schwartz 1991, 721). As female writers, their place as women within this binary concept of poetic inspiration is limited. Regarding the *Künstlerroman*, Friedman states that in this genre "the choice to be an artist or a woman" often comes as a decisive moment for female protagonists. These categories, described by Friedman as "mutually exclusive", are a consequence of the binary opposition of poet and muse (Friedman 1990, 105). *Orlando*, *HERmione,* and *The Heart to Artemis*, so I will argue, are as *Künstlerromane* deeply concerned with the artistic awakening of the female artist, the topoi of inspiration, and the question of becoming of the female artist.

Orlando is by its very plot line concerned with gender fluidity and thereby describes the becoming of both a male and female artist. The sex change in the middle of the novel is of less importance compared to the fluidity of sexual orientation and gender performance before and after the sex change. The readability of gender is, from the beginning on, questioned in Woolf's text. As an Elizabethan court boy, Orlando's taste was "broad" (Woolf 2018, 26) and he is, in the very first sentence, ascribed a male gender, accompanied with the immediate confession that "the

fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (1), saying that this ascription is not necessarily definite. Furthermore, Orlando feels drawn to lovers, "which, whether boy's or women's […]" figure attracts his attention (34). Throughout the novel, the object of Orlando's desire is fluid, which affects the perception and performance of gender in general. Later, Orlando's female gender is equally non-telling, when it comes to the choice of lovers and the erotic desire of the now-female protagonist. Orlando enjoys the "the love of both sexes equally" as "her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive" (202). The gender dynamic of subject and object becomes fluid, and desire, be it erotic of for the sake of the arts, is loosened from gender categories.

As Orlando embraces a moment of inspirational connection to her Elizabethan poetic forefathers, "Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Johnson, Milton"– the "heroes" (81) of Orlando's youth–, "the distraction of her sex, which hers was, and what it meant, subsided" (152). Imagined under a "risen moon on turbulent waters" (151), Orlando encounters a sphere of inspiration – bodyless, but genderless? According to Schwartz, inscribing the moon in this scene recalls Artemis, the huntress who guides women through childbirth (Schwartz 1991, 741).

The figure of Artemis will be more important for H.D. and even for Ellerman; however, it is noteworthy that Artemis is characterized as a goddess that is not defined by heterosexual relationships and can therefore be appropriated in terms of a non-heteronormative inspirational topos. With Woolf, inspirational figures like Shakespeare are connotated as obstetricians of inspiration.

In *A Room of one's own*, Virginia Woolf speaks about androgyny as the true gender of creativity. The "androgynous mind", a term she adopted from Coleridge, is described as "naturally creative" (Woolf 2015, 71). Hence, Woolf has laid out two paths of understanding artistic creation beyond the heterosexual poet-muse complex: the ambiguity of gender dislocates the gender of subject and object but has its limits when trying to overcome the duality of subject and object. In Woolf's essay, the androgynous dissolves the subject/object relationship – similar to H.D.'s figure of the prophetess, in the androgynous mind artist and muse become one.

The fluidity of one's own gender and desire is equally important in *HERmione*. H.D. tries to deconstruct the heterosexual poet-muse relationship by deconstructing her own gender first, and consequently the binary opposition of male-female desire. Going for a walk in the woods, Hermione and George replay a scene of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

> "Now is this the forest of Arden?" […] She swerved, she would yet dramatize herself, she turned as with stage gesture toward stage trees. But Orlando couldn't save Her, Rosalind couldn't save Her. […] Almost this is the forest of Arden and Orlando stepping out with agile feet across leaves strewn across a narrow wood path. Almost she was lost, stepping back and back into the pages of some familiar rhythm, now this is the forest of Arden. Almost her long legs were bound in Elizabethan trunk hose and almost in her hand, under her hand was a silver chain which almost she was about to drop about the throat of George, of Orlando kneeling, wear this for me one out of suits with fortune… (H.D. 1981, 64–66)

According to Conilleau, dialogue and internal focalization become blurred in this scene (Conilleau 2010, 5). Within the novel's highly associative text, internal and external vision overwrite each other continuously. Palimpsest as poetic practice are H.D.'s major accomplishments as a modernist poet. The palimpsest "simultaneously documents and destroys its own history, preserving earlier forms in the remnants of imperfectly erased portions of its continuous text" while over-writing the earlier record (Benstock 2021, 350). In *HERmione*, palimpsestic writing manifests itself in the way that H.D.'s own conscience is constantly overwritten by external scripts, and these scripts are than developed, shifted, de-centred. The Shakespaerean script of *As You Like It* becomes her reality; Hermione plays Rosalind, playing Ganymed who plays Rosalind for Orlando. Gender is constantly overwritten by another; Hermione as a four-facetted figure dissolves the gender of muse and poet, of George and Hermione.

Artemis appears as a mythological figure in the moment Hermione linguistically dissolves George's vision of her as a "Florentine page or some Florentine girl dressed for a pageant", referring to the Shakespearean scene above. The Florentine page, devoted to "the Queen Diana", becomes a motive that is overwritten in the subsequent sentence. In a chain of associations, the pageant becomes a girl dressed as pageant, becomes Dian/Diana, becomes non-Artemis, as to George "Her was Dian or Diana, never Artemis" (H.D. 1981, 172). George places Hermione in a specific mythological spot, and Hermione slides semantically out of this preposition by the dissolution of gender and semantics.

The Elizabethan girl-page as a gender fluid figure also appears in Ellerman's memoirs. Bryher imagines herself as a "Gazzoli page, a cupbearer at the feast

of minds" (Bryher 2006, 211). Throughout her childhood, Bryher describes her alter ego as a "cabin boy", an analogue figure. Bryher-as-cabin-boy lives an alternative life in her imagination and experiences the freedom that she is withheld (33). In Ellerman's text, The Florentine/Shakespearean page boy – which Woolf's Orlando once had been for the Queen–, layered with the figure of the cabin boy, functions as Bryher's dissociated personality; it embodies all the impossibilities of Bryher's life. Ellerman uses a comparative mode, similar to Woolf: If Bryher is Judith Shakespeare, Bryher-the-cabin-boy becomes William.

The myth of Pygmalion is inscribed in Hermione's very name: Hermione is given her name not by her parents, but by a male ancestor. She is made a Shakespearean figure by that name. Shakespeare himself created her, in a way: "I am out of the Temple Shakespeare. I am out of The Winter's Tale." (32). The Shakespearean Hermione, Queen and wife of Leontes, is suspected of infidelity and sentenced to death. At the end of the play, her statue is brought to life due to her daughter Perdita's longing. As Friedman argues, the Pygmalion myth is realized by the love of the child and the help of the witch Paulina, not by Leontes' male desire for his wife (121). I would argue that Artemis refigures in Paulina as an obstetrician. Again, the figure of Artemis is present, when inspiration is given, when creation takes place. Eugenia's poetics of love is mirrored in the way Friedman analyses Shakespeare's Perdita as Pygmalion.

In H.D.'s novel, the male Pygmalion is exchanged in a similar manner. The moment in which Hermione realizes that "no other than Fayne […] was Pygmalion" (138), erotic desire, love, and creation become entangled. The revelation comes to Hermione as she watches Fayne acting on stage as Pygmalion in Shaw's play. The playful change of gender by performance of a dramatic script parallels Hermione and George in the Woods, playing Ganymed and Orlando.

With H.D., the myth of Pygmalion functions as a carefully layered system. First, George Lowndes become Hermione's lover and likewise the creator of her personhood and her as a poet. Hermione longs for George "to make the thing an integral, herself integrity" (H.D. 1981, 63). When confronted with marriage, Hermione reads her situation with the mythological image of Undine. The young mermaid sacrifices herself for her lover. Realizing that "[her] name is Undine", Hermione becomes aware that marrying George will resolve in sacrificing what has once made her a subject: her voice, her poetry. The myth of Undine, layered with the version of Christian Anderson's fairytale, reveals what Friedman has called "mutually exclusive" options: marrying George demands Hermione

to give up her art, and to become object (again). Referring to Shaw's play, in which the masterpiece is not a statue but the creation of a vocally improved Eliza Doolittle, H.D. brings the question of voice again into focus.

It is noteworthy that Woolf's Orlando receives an education similar to Doolittle's. Her poetic style is refined by Addison, Swift and Pope teaching "the natural run of the voice in speaking" (Woolf 2018, 194). While Woolf's Orlando turns away from her Higgings-Pygmalion fathers due to their disrespect of women, H.D.'s character is thrown into an existential struggle for voice. In contrast to the motive of Undine, voice can be given by a creator, or has to be sacrificed for a lover, which deeply contradicts Hermione's poetics of loving being an integral part of writing, if lover and creator are the same person. Hermione becomes caught in between both George and Fayne, both lovers and creators of her, both awakening her erotic desire, and her desire for art. When Fayne and Hermione kiss for the first time, both desires culminate and Galatea comes to life with the words "'And I—I'll make you breathe, my breathless statue.' 'Statue? You—you are the statue'" (H.D. 1981, 163). No indication is given who speaks to whom. Both become, as Benstock has put it, each other's Pygmalion. Nevertheless, according to Benstock, the two women cannot help but adapt an "inscripted patriarchal code" (Benstock 2021, 346), as the subject/object relationship only shifts position, but cannot be dissolved.

Performing the Pygmalion myth, Hermione comes alive, when George acknowledges her poetry, and becomes statue again, when he withdraws his recognition. George appears then, in the tradition of Artemis, as an obstetrician: "What George holds in his hands is my life's beginning" (148). Thus, coming to live as an artist seems connotated as an active mode, while the help of a (passive) guide is necessary. With H.D., Pygmalion is no longer a master, but a midwife.

The reverse movement – life being taken – is played out after George feels betrayed by Fayne and Hermione. Hermione's experience and inner vision overlap when she feels water running down her body (167) – an allusion to Undine. Hermione is about to lose her voice, her art. After George calls her poems "rotten" (167) repeatedly and then (nearly) rapes her (173), Hermione's body becomes "marble" again. The love withdrawn, Hermione loses her art and figures herself as a "statue", losing Artemis' assistance (175). *The Winter's Tale* is re-lived again, when Hermione finds herself in the icy Ferrrand Forest. "[T]he ice crack[s]": Hermione is born again, with Grim and Jim as her artemisian "gatekeepers", "opening a gate" to her future beyond the limits of the novel (234).

The title of Ellerman's *The Heart to Artemis* is taken right out of her text. Being an adolescent, Bryher describes herself constantly struggling for freedom. A turning point in her life is depicted as the moment she devotes herself to Artemis, experiencing a moment of sublime wilderness in the Swiss mountains:

> I wrote my own myth unconsciously in those hot, peaceful days among the petal-shaped lakes that became so much more familiar to me than an English meadow. The Greeks knew a lot about the spirit and it was not by chance that Artemis had a band of nine-year-old girls among her followers. […] Up in the high valleys, among the dark red mountain pinks, I was wild and free. Not lightly, but with a not to be restrained and unchildlike passion, I had to give myself, the heart to Artemis, the body to exploration. (111)

This oath is doubled in Ellerman's work *Gate to sea*: Myro's vows on Artemis have been read by Fedor as a confession of lesbianism and a renunciation of female gender concepts alike (Fedor 2013, 19).

While Artemis appears in the novels of Woolf and H.D. as a way to de-sexualize creation, the awakening described by Bryher's is not artistic, but, analogue to the earlier reference to pre-history, concerned with her personhood. Claiming a life, "wild and free", Bryher brings together Artemis as mythological model and aspirations of the era of 'the new woman'. Bryher answers her centuries' constraints on women by identifying with an archaic female myth. Although Bryher understands herself as a writer –"a poet, even a visionary, but […] not an intellectual type" (Bryher 2006, 140) – art is only configured as art if it supports or realizes social freedom. In Bryher's understanding, "art and freedom" cannot be done without each other (138).

Within all three novels, concepts of inspiration and myth are constantly re-arranged, shifted and over-written. Hereafter, the status of the artist has become gender-indifferent with Woolf, the artist's desire multidimensional with H.D., and the concept of the arts bound to the freedom of personhood with Bryher.

Peers

The texts of Woolf, H.D., and Ellerman provide extensive meditations on the status of the female artist from a mythologic-historic perspective. However, it is possible

to read them as an a-historic comment on male peer artists or as a specific comment on their modernist contemporaries and the struggle they have with finding their place among them.

In Woolf's novel *Orlando*, pouring the tea for the genius replicates the passive position of a female artist in intellectual circles. Unlike, for example, Gertrude Stein, Orlando cannot establish herself as a peer and is refused to become an equal to these geniuses. Orlando's contemporaries are in their views less based in the eighteenth century, but rather seem timeless, like her ideas on fellow male artists:

> A woman knows very well that, though a wit sends her his poems, praises her judgement, solicits her criticism, and drinks her tea, this by no means signifies that he respects her opinions, admires her understanding, or will refuse, though the rapier is denied him, to run her through the body with his pen. (196)

H.D.'s novel has been read by several scholars as a comment on H.D.'s relationship to Ezra Pound (Nair 2012). Even without that context, it becomes evident how Hermione develops and argues her own poetics against George's. The tree becomes an important metaphor for this struggle of independence and confidence. With George, "writing had no mere relationship with trees on trees" (H.D. 1981, 72). Trees are connected to Pennsylvania (5), they become the scenery to her rehearsal of the Shakespearean text (62), they function as suppressive "walls" that she feels captured by (7), this oppressive power turns out to be lesbian desire – all of which George is neither able to understand nor to love "properly" (73).The tree expresses linguistic play, psychologic analysis, and the struggle for a writing (of the) self:

> "I am Tree exactly. […] I knew George could never love a tree properly. Now she saw Tree and I am Tree and I am the word Aum and I am Her exactly. For the writing was what has started things and the writing was the same writing." (197)

This raw and psycho-linguistic approach is contrasted to his poetry based on mere "sophistication" (133) – while George seems conventional, Hermione's poetry is confidently presented as radically modern.

When travelling Finland in 1938, being far away from her continental and metropolitan life, Bryher becomes aware that she had been "following the wrong path":

> I did not belong to the literary movements nor even to a particular intellectual group. I was an Elizabethan who needed action and the sea. I would only become a writer when I returned to my proper material and I wondered why I had wasted so much time. As a beginning, I decided that I would learn to fly. (Bryher 2006, 335)

Turning away from what can be understood quite frankly as the European modernist movement, Ellerman let Bryher become a true "restless modern" (186). For Bryher, art can only ever be modern, if it supports "a new approach, a different world" (254) for women. In her memoirs, Ellerman describes the modernist artists as rather conventional:

> Suddenly I realized to my horror that it was a vircarage garden party in reverse. These rebels were no more free from conventions than they had fastened upon themselves than a group of old ladies gossiping over their knitting. (264)

Bryher describes herself as "utterly in sympathy with the rebellion of the group" but points out that "their solutions did not solve [her] particular problem" (253). Rather, she mocks the behaviour and attitude of the Parisian group of modernists as they only follow "the Quarter's code": "be drunk, be reckless, stick together with the bunch" (262). In Ellerman's memoirs, radical modernist freedom and the arts of the modern age are not to be found in male dominated circles of literary modernism– but apart from them. Like Orlando and Hermione, Bryher can only make sense of her own writing outside male dominated peer circles.

Woolf, H.D., and Bryher have elaborated throughout their texts the dis-positioning of the female artist. Their texts show a deep understanding of myth as key to *their* modernism. By appropriation of archaic antiquity, subversion of the *Künstlerroman*, and development of their own poetics of writing and living, they have created their own mythical space – inhabited by potential authors, mothers and midwifes.

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