

H.D. and the Translation of Classical Greek Literature

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ABSTRACT

The American poet H.D. was one of the principle exponents of Imagism, an early twentieth-century school of poetry whose sometime affiliates included Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, and whose supporters included T.S. Eliot, F.S. Flint and T.E. Hulme. The early Modernist call for a classical revival, the terms of which were laid down mainly by Pound and Eliot, was taken particularly seriously by H.D., whose engagement with classical myth and especially with Greek tragedy spanned her whole career. Despite the numerous translations from Greek tragedy that H.D. produced, almost no research has been carried out into this area of the poet's work. This thesis aims therefore to address this research gap and analyses not only the translations that H.D. produced during the early stages of her career (1913-1920), but also the contexts in which these translations were rendered. For, as Simon claims, "the intentions of translation can never be understood in isolation, but always in relation to a social, political or intellectual framework" (Simon 1996: 39).

The driving force behind the study of these translations is the desire to interrogate the extent to which feminist criticism of H.D.'s work and its attendant focus on gender issues can be applied to H.D.'s translations and her role as translator. To this end, I firstly conduct an in-depth study into a series of contextualising discourses which shed light on the significance of H.D.'s role as translator. These discourses, which I have organised according to four principle themes (Modernism and Translation, Imagism, Gendered Hellenism and Classical Engagement), seek to provide evidence of the influences and power relations that fed into H.D.'s translations and shaped her activity as translator. I then analyse three specific translations rendered by H.D. during the early part of her career: the choruses from Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1915), the choruses from Euripides' *Hippolytus* (1919), and Homer's *Odyssey* (1920). My aim here is to gauge the extent to which H.D. "acts in a feminist manner" (DuPlessis 1986: 19). The poet's early translations are a viable focus of study in this regard because of their intermediary nature. Standing as they do between silence and "original" poetic expression, they serve as a training ground in which the poet can explore different aesthetic positions and develop various thematic considerations.

KEYWORDS: decadent poetry, Euripides, gender, H.D., Hellenism, Imagism, Modernism, Romanticism.

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