In her book *Tribute to Freud*, where she reflects on her psychoanalytic sessions with Freud, H.D. notes, “There were two’s and two’s and two’s in [her] life”, implying, as Eileen Gregory puts it, an erotic triangulation.¹ In light of this, her poems in *Hymen* (1921) can be read as the very manifestation of the triangle motif. Dedicating the volume to her daughter Perdita and her companion Winnifred Ellerman (Bryher), H.D. sings the erotic bonds that have sustained her and celebrates her “marriage” with them (hence the title). Figures such as Demeter, Thetis, Leda, Helen, Phaedra and Hippolyta are employed as poetic masks to draw into focus the mother’s desire for the lost daughter, the woman’s erotic animation, and the daughter’s desire for homoerotic union with the mother, which are the main driving forces of the collection.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva develops her theory of the “abject”, its relation to the concept of the mother and its significance in the constitution of the subject. The realm of the mother, the semiotic *chora*, is characterized by a lack of differentiation between child and mother, a pre-verbal dimension of language marked by sensual impressions, echolalias, bodily rhythms, sounds and incoherence. The mother must be repudiated and expelled (“abjected” is Kristeva’s term) so that the child will be able to turn towards the father, to the realm of paternal symbolic order, structured by language that conforms to the linguistic rules of grammar, syntax, propriety and, of course, socialization. The expulsion (“abjection”) of the mother is not only the precondition for entrance into the symbolic, but it also becomes the precondition for an idealization that is the basis of love as *agape* (paternal) always in conflict with *eros* (maternal, passionate and destructive love).²

Although the child constitutes the mother’s authentication in the symbolic, the loving mother – different from “the clinging mother” – is willing to facilitate the intervention of the third party, the father, to allow the subject to be formed. Thus, the process follows a triangular pattern from which any diversion will entail disruption in the formation of the subject. A glimpse into H.D.’s childhood years reveals an inadequately structured triangle:

A girl-child, a doll, an aloof and silent father form the triangle, this triangle, this family romance .... Mother, a virgin, the Virgin ... adoring with faith, building a dream, and the dream is symbolized by the third member of the trinity, the child, the doll in her arms.

The loosely joined sides, however, were never meant to be fixed permanently for the father was “a little un-get-able, a little too far away”, an inaccessible figure engrossed in planets and stars, “who seldom even at table focused upon anything nearer literally, than the moon”. An equally absent mother would direct her maternal semiotic force into painting, but was never the one who would draw the girl to her, imbue her with her semiotic and then release her to enter the symbolic. She would instead favour the younger brother as more advanced, “quaint and clever”, and ignore “Mignon” as “not very advanced”, but “wispy and mousy”.

In her effort to reconstruct the triangle, the adult H.D. first turned to the remote maternal figure and sought ways to rediscover her. She longed to share her art. She recalls that the sight of her mother’s hand-painted dishes “fired [her] very entrails with adoration” and she wanted “a fusion or a transfusion of [her] mother’s art”: “I wanted to paint like my mother.”

As we have seen, according to Kristeva the speaking subject revolves round two conceptual and dialectical categories, the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic is pre-verbal, characterized by rhythms,