

H.D.'S "MID-DAY": A LINGUISTIC APPROACH

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The significance the art of poetry had for H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961) at the beginning of her career seems to be contained in the well-known Imagist precepts Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington and H.D. herself proclaimed in 1912: “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective; to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; as regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (Pound, 1968, p. 3). Although H.D.’s later literary career expanded the early craftsmanship of her much anthologized “Oread”, “Orchard”, “Pear tree”, and other poems, as she delved into the world of the stream-of-consciousness novel, essays, drama, translations from the classics, memoirs and longer poetic works (which led to her receiving the Award of Merit Medal for Poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1960), besides other manuscripts that have only been published fairly recently, her real place in the canon of American poetry is still not completely settled. For even if the impact of Imagism on the style of modern American poets is undeniable, many of H.D.’s early poems have been partially forgotten, in the sense that not enough critical attention has been devoted to them. This neglect could be explained by Cary Nelson’s commentary in “The diversity of American Poetry” that

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what we need to recover and to learn how to value is not only poetry we can recognize as excellent (the criteria for which are always changing and always ideological) but also poetry of significant historical interest – poetry that helped shape American history, poetry that offers alternative visions of American culture, poetry that contextualizes the major achievement of literary movements (Nelson, 1988, p. 914).

For H.D.'s Imagist poetry, although many times excellent, initially ignores this historical dimension, as the title of her first book, *Sea garden* (1916), already suggests. This neglect, however, seems to me to stem much more from a lack of linguistic insight into the verbal complexity of some of her poems, as is the case of "Mid-day" than from her own limited aesthetics, for even if the criteria for recognizing excellence can be subject to changing ideologies no one can deny the objectivity a linguistic reading can bring to a poem. My purpose, therefore, is to give a reading of this poem which will recover some of its "hidden" features, by highlighting the various levels of organization of language – Realization, Form and Semantics (Leech, 1969, p. 37) – which "Mid-day"¹ presents, in order to reach its Total Significance. Simultaneously, we shall be establishing correlations among the three levels, i.e., pointing out incidences, equivalences and deviations, in this way trying to give not a "signatum" but to create "signantia" for the very "signans" of the text (Jakobson, 1971, p. 658). The integration of all aspects among the three levels rarely occurs, though; sometimes only one aspect contributes with a meaningful element which provokes the appearance of a new motif in the poem, and aesthetic perception becomes satisfied with a much smaller amount than the absolute whole.

As in so many of H.D.'s other early nature poems, the Level of Realization (graphology and phonology) receives a special emphasis in relation to the other levels of linguistic description. The poem has an irregular four-strophic form, with four lines of verse in the first and fourth strophes, eight in the second and ten in the third. Moreover, most of the lines are of different lengths, varying from three to eight words – long and short lines alternate up to line seventeen presenting the world of the poet, lines eighteen to twenty introduce the world

¹ The following analysis is an adaptation of the chapter III, part 5, of my M.A. thesis *Word, image, and symbol in H.D.'s early nature poetry*. São Paulo, 1974 - USP. 197 p.

of the poplar, while lines twenty-five and twenty-six resume the motif of the first part:

1. The light beats upon me.
2. I am startled -
3. A split leaf crackles on the paved floor -
4. I am anguished – defeated.'

5. A slight wind shakes the seed-pods –
6. My thoughts are spent
7. As the black seeds.
8. My thoughts tear me,
9. I dread their fever.
10. I am scattered in its whirl.
11. I am scattered like
12. The hot shrivelled seeds.

13. The shrivelled seeds
14. Are split on the path -
15. The grass bends with dust,
16. The grape slips
17. Under its crackled leaf:
18. Yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
19. And the blackened stalks of mint,
20. The poplar is bright on the hill,
21. The poplar spreads out,
22. Deep-rooted among trees.

23. O poplar, you are great
24. Among the hill-stones,
25. While I perish on the path
26. Among the crevices of the rocks.

This graphological irregularity, so characteristic of free verse, makes Cleath Brook's statement about the Imagists' repudiation of the poetic tradition seem particularly relevant here, for H.D. also rejects "formal verse systems", developing her poem by "cumulative accretion", by "piling up detail on detail", so that "raw 'content' overrides and determines form" (1939, p. 74). Besides, this irregularity draws our attention even more to the phonological level of the poem, in which the relevant sound effects are obtained through other means than

end-rhyme, thus leading to Jakobson's assertion that "the superaverage accumulation of a certain class of phonemes or a contrastive assemblage of two opposite classes in the sound texture of a line, of a stanza, of a poem acts like an 'undercurrent of meaning'" (1960, p.373).

The vocalic texture is characterized by the foregrounding of the diphthong /aI/ and of stressed vowel sounds such as found in "A split leaf crackles on the paved floor". These intermittent repetitions create a contrastive pattern mainly between the high or closed /i/ (as in "leaf") with its piercing sound effect, and the very low or open /aI/ (as in "I"), with its sonorous and soft qualities (both sounds repeated thirteen times).

As the incidence of /i/ and /aI/ is stronger in the first and second strophes, growing weaker in the third and practically disappearing in the fourth, it emphasizes the impact and oppressing violence of midday light and heat on the addresser and on nature, by making the repeated striking of the /i/ "string" convey to us the beating of the piercing sun rays upon the "I", leading to its destruction in the last strophe ("I perish") together with the disappearance of the /i/ at the end of the third strophe.

This same "aggressiveness" of the /i/ sound in the vowel texture is reinforced at the consonantal level, where the great majority of the voiceless plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/, with their flinty hardness, is sometimes preceded or followed by the voiceless fricatives /s/ and /sh/, in various alliterative and cross-alliterative effects, making the impact and implacability of midday even more graspable. The predominance of short, end-stopped lines also helps to enhance the abrupt and broken-off sound of these plosives, while the impression of fragmentation in the split and crackled leaves is onomatopoeically conveyed by the interspersed /k/ in "crackles", "black", "scattered", "shakes", "like", "crevices", "rocks". Simultaneously, the repeated shrill sounds of /s/ and /sh/, particularly in the second strophe, reinforce the rustling sound of dried up leaves and seeds whirling on the ground, as projected through alliterative effects in "the shrivelled seeds", to cross alliteration in "a split leaf crackles on the paved floor", and complex alliteration in "the grass bends with dust", "the grape slips", "yet far beyond the spent seed-pods", "and the blackened istolks of mint", "among the crevices of the rocks", "under its crackled leaf".

Further, the compound "seed-pods", phonologically reminding us of "thought", prepares us for the superposition of "seeds/thoughts", similar in their fricative envelopes and in their one-stressed vowels, thus becoming united not only in sound, but also morphologically as plural nouns, and semantically by the simile "my thoughts are spent / as the black seeds", leading to the identification of the addresser's scattered thoughts with the scattered seeds.

Lines twenty to twenty-three, nevertheless – in which the poplar is described – serve as a phonological counterpoint to the broken off effect of these plosives and fricatives, for in them the liquid /l/ and the glide /r/ are foregrounded. Both suggest, with their rolling sounds which have an expansive, strong quality, the “wholeness” of the poplar, this quick-growing and straight tree, which dominates the distant hill:

the poplar is bright on the hill:	/p.pl.r/br..t/..l/
the poplar spreads out,	/p.pl.r/ /,pr..j/
deep-rooted among trees.	/...p./ /r..t/ /tr..j/
O poplar, you are great	/p.pl.r/ /gr..t/

Moreover, the high or closed sounds in “deep-rooted among trees” convey an impression of penetration and depth by their piercing quality, besides forming another cross-alliteration (deep-rooted/trees) which highlights the fact that “tree” is contained in “deep-rooted”, thus further uniting the three words in sound and meaning.

Therefore, one cannot simply say that the sound effects of this poem serve only to enhance its sonority, for “ce rôle structural (et structurant) des sons doit être distingué de celui qu’on leur a traditionnellement attribué en étudiant le symbolisme phonétique” (Ducrot; Todorov, 1972, p. 244). As Jakobson corroborates, “any attempt to confine such poetic conventions as meter, alliteration, or rhyme to the sound level are speculative reasonings without any empirical justification. The projection of the equational principle into the sequence has a much deeper and wider significance” (1960, p. 359).

This “language” of sounds is now further projected onto the poem’s rhythm, which also exemplifies the Imagists’ concern that “in poetry, a new cadence means a new idea”, or, as Pound argued in his “Credo”, each emotion has a characteristic rhythmical pattern which alone gives it adequate expression: “I believe in the ‘absolute rhythm’ [...] in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion [...] to be expressed. A man’s rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable” (1968, p. 9).

The first strophe of “Mid-day” has four end-stopped lines, three of them short, giving the impression that the addresser’s flow of speech has almost been brought to a halt. This increased tension is even more emphasized by the presence of dashes, two in final position, one in the middle, indicating not only an abrupt turn in the sentence, but corroborating a hesitating, broken rhythm. Except for the two run-on lines, this staccato-movement of end-stopped lines

continues in the second strophe, with another dash at the end of line five, marking again a symbolic pause for the poet's halting speech. Simultaneously, the particular density of plosives, which goes with an exceptional density of monosyllabic words (Leech, p. 94) further emphasize the brokenness in the rhythmical flow of these cut-off sentences, which thus convey again the speaker's distress at midday's heat and light. Lines three and five are somewhat longer, though, therefore avoiding the monotony of only short lines in the first two strophes, and also preparing us for the description of the poplar, with its sweeping rhythm, confirming a shift in the subject.

In the third strophe there is still a slight majority of short and end-stopped lines, the dash in line fourteen marking the special inwardness of the persona's consciousness and confirming the broken and uneven rhythm of her torn thoughts and speech. Nevertheless, the rhythmical boundaries of the three lines after the colon in line seventeen, exactly in the middle of the third strophe, indicate that a change has occurred in the tone and the theme of the poem, for lines eighteen to twenty form a block of longer, more fluent and even-worded lines. This change is further substantiated by the "island" of liquids and glides emphasized in lines twenty-one to twenty-three, which describe the poplar, suggesting that the persona has at last found something positive in her vision of the far away poplar, a place of solidity and certainty in contrast to her anguished and scattered thoughts. This change continues in the fourth strophe, its two run-on lines indicating more fluency in the addresser's thoughts, as the poem comes to a closure.

In this way, the group of shorter lines with their halting rhythm serve to foreground the persona's oppressed mood, caused by the continuous striking of midday light and heat upon her. On the other hand, the group of longer lines conveys the impression that the addresser has caught her breath and strength again at the sight of the poplar on the hill, only to fall back into her defeat at the end of the poem, by the realization that her end is to "perish on the path/ among the crevices of the rocks". Thus, we can see that H.D.'s preoccupation with sound and rhythm is to produce not an effect for its own sake only, but that both help in shaping the meaning of the poem, establishing its tone, i.e., the poet's attitude towards the facts of "Mid-day". This fitness of sounds, length of lines and rhythm, to sense, proves once more that rhythm and sense have to be read simultaneously, in order to experience the whole poem.

In regard to the Level of Form (lexicon and grammar) "Mid-day" presents a great incidence of nouns in relation to other parts of speech, thus filling the poem with visual images. Classifying these nouns according to their common semantic features, we find a "cumulative accretion" of lexemes refer-

ring to the paradigmatic order of: 1. "plant": leaf (twice), seed (five times), pods (twice), grass, grape, stalk, mint, poplar (three times), root, tree – in a process of continual gradation upwards; 2. "earth": floor, path (twice), hill (twice), stones, crevices, rocks, dust; 3. "natural agent": light, wind, whirl; 4. "morbid condition": fever.

The adjectives can also be classified according to their common paradigms of: 1. "disintegration": split (twice) scattered (twice), crackled; 2. "dried-up state": black, blackened, shriveled; 3. "force": bright, deep-rooted, great; 4. "oppressive and negative state of mind or physical condition": startled, anguished, defeated, hot, spent (twice).

The seven active verbs in the present tense (beats, crackles, shakes, tears, bends, slips, perish) belong to the paradigmatic order of "disintegration", "submission", "destruction", once more in a gradation, as a consequence of the meaning of the first verb in the poem, "beat", with its negative semantic feature of "aggressiveness". The verb "dread" could also be included in this paradigm of "destruction" for it is a consequence of the feverish state of the addresser's thoughts, i.e., dreading a destructive condition. The only active verb not included here is "to spread out" with its semantic feature of "extended surface", "gathering force", and thus, the only "positive" verb, which, moreover, refers to the poplar.

There is also an emphatic occurrence of the verb "be" in reference to the first person. It is used twice in the present tense, first person singular, to imply "staticity": "I am startled", "I am anguished / defeated"; twice in the first person singular in the passive voice, conveying fragility: "I am scattered"; twice in the third person plural: "my thoughts are spent", "the shriveled seeds are split", conveying disintegration. In counterpoint, the other uses of "be" refer to the poplar, with a connotation of "force" and "extension": the poplar is "bright", "you are great".

The three verbal adjectives ("startled", "anguished" and "defeated") in the first strophe (which have their inflexional suffix /ed/ pronounced differently, although morphologically belonging to the same structural group) help to convey the gradual change in the addresser's emotions, for actually they are not synonymous – as the parallelistic construction could imply – but form a subtle progression, from "startle" to "anguish" to "defeat".

The massive presence of the definite article (seventeen) operates a singularization and a determination of the nouns in contrast to the indefinite articles (two) in lines three and five. This foregrounding of the indefinite article coincides with the somewhat longer extension of these two lines in relation to the others (except the block of lines eighteen to twenty), thus pointing to the

two words which actually initiate the associative process poet–nature: “a split leaf crackles on the paved floor” and “a slight wind shakes the seed–pods”.

The pronouns form another group, particularly the subjective pronoun “I”, which occurs six times, reinforced by the first possessive pronoun “my” in “my thoughts” (twice) and continued in the objective pronoun “me” in “upon me” and “tear me”. The subjective pronoun “you” is emphasized by its isolated occurrence in “O poplar, you are great”, while the possessive pronouns “its” and “their”, in the second strophe, create a contrasting function in relation to the “I”. As the pronoun “I” is concentrated in the first two strophes (with the exception of “I perish” in line twenty–five), it again separates the poem into two blocks – lines one to seventeen, concentrated on the relationship poet–nature submitted to midday light and heat, and lines eighteen to twenty six, describing the poplar – a split in the body of the poem which has already been indicated at the Level of Realization.

Prepositions of place also form a significant pattern, divided into two main groups: one with “on”, the other with “among”. Besides contrasting the nouns that specify the place where the poplar stands, with connotations of elevation and verticality (“on the hill”, “among trees”, “among the hill–stones”), with the nouns that indicate the place where the poet/seeds are, connoting depression, levelness, sunkness (“on the paved floor”, “on the path”, “among the crevices of the rocks”), they also give plasticity to the scene, by emphasizing the two opposite sites of the poem – hill and ground – and thus retrieving again the contrasting condition of the poplar (strong) versus the poet’s (weak). Concomitantly, they create two perpendicular movements – one ascending from “on the floor” to “on the hill”, and one descending from “among trees” and “among hill–stones” to “while I perish on the path”, “among the crevices of the rocks” – both making us visualize the sunrays at midday from “light” to “floor”, then back up to “hill” and “trees”). The horizontal movement of the “scattering” out of the words on the page, creating the irregular lineation of the poem, together with the centrifugal motion of the verbs further enhance the effect of these prepositions.

A third group would gather the other prepositions: “upon me”, “in its whirl”, “under its crackled leaf”, “beyond the spent seed–pods”. By its distinct position in the block of longer lines, the preposition “beyond” preceded by the adverb “far” is also foregrounded (further supported by the adversative conjunction “yet” which marks the beginning of change), thus conveying the gap that actually exists between the reality surrounding the persona of the poet and the ideality surrounding the poplar. In their turn, the conjunctions “yet” and “while” introduce the two longest sentences in the poem, which also contrast the poplar

with the "spent" and "blackened" nature around the poet, and, again, the poplar's "greatness" with the poet's "annihilation".

In this manner, these different parts of speech, sometimes repeated in different positions and with various grammatical functions, help to increase or decrease the original force of the words to which they are attached. In the case of the adjectives, they abase the nouns they qualify ("split leaf", "black seeds", "hot shrivelled seeds", "crackled leaf", "spent seed-pods" and "blackened stalks of mint") and, in a wider semantic context, this abasement could point to a loss of creative force. In the same way, the "I" becomes disintegrated and deprived of her force by the verbal adjectives "startled", "anguished", "defeated" – she can only "be" and not "act". On the other hand, as the addresser turns her thoughts to the poplar which is "bright", "deep-rooted" and "great", the adjectives increase the original potency and symbolism of the tree image.

This opposition in the connotative aspect of the adjectives is also seen in the grouping of nouns which refer to parts of the paradigmatic order "plant" (which can be scattered, torn, split) and the whole tree (which is deep-rooted), as well as in the group of words referring to the paradigmatic order "earth", as "hill" versus "path"/ "floor", and "hill-stones" versus "crevices on the rocks"/ "dust".

The different grammatical functions some of these words have further enhances this opposition:

1. "a split leaf crackles"(verb); "under its crackled leaf" (verbal adjective)
2. "a split leaf"(verbal adjective); "the shrivelled seeds are split" (passive voice)
3. "my thoughts are spent"(passive voice); "beyond the spent seed-pods" (verbal adjective)
4. "as the black seeds"(adjective); "and the blackened stalks of mint" (verbal adjective).

Thus, the contrast of two worlds – the addresser's versus the poplar's – is felt not only in the sounds and graphology but also in the vocabulary of the poem: here lies the world the poet lives in – split, crackled, spent, scattered, blackened; there stands the positive, forceful and ideal world the poet envisions – bright, firm, great as the poplar on the hill.

"Mid-day" also presents a more complex syntactic structure than most of H.D.'s early poems. Examining the relationship between the elements which formalize the context of the poem, such as subject, object, coordinated and subordinated syntagms, one sees that the grammatical arrangement of words into sentences also contributes significantly to the grasping of the total meaning of the poem. "Mid-day" comprises fifteen sentences: four simple sentences (with only one Finite verb) in the first and second strophes, three subordinate

clauses in the third and two coordinated clauses in the fourth. The third strophe, the longest in the poem, presents the most complex structure, with its five sentences: lines 13–14,15,16–17: simple sentences; lines 18–20, 21–22: complex sentences (more than one Finite verb). These two last sentences formalize the poet's vision of the poplar, while the fourth strophe, with the other two complex sentences, points to the synthesis of the poem, by uniting all the "scattered" elements, in the contrast "poplar/I".

Simultaneously, there is an equilibrium in the syntagmatic construction of the sentences, as their internal distribution into Noun Phrases, Verbal Phrases and Adverbial Phrases reveals. In the first strophe, the syntagmatic patterns NP/VP/AP refer to a natural event while the patterns NP/VP/NP refer to a personal agent – the poet's reaction:

NP VP AP – the light	/ beats	/ upon me
NP VP NP – I	/ am	/ startled
NP VP AP – a split leaf	/ crackles	/ on the paved floor
NP VP NP – I	/ am	/ anguished – defeated.

There is again an absolute regularity in the syntagmatic disposition of sentences in the second strophe, pointing to the identification poet/nature, for lines five to nine and eleven have the syntagmatic pattern NP/VP/NP. Line ten presents a slight change (NP/VP/NP/AP) and is thus foregrounded in relation to the others, which is further enhanced by the fact that the word "whirl" absorbs through its ambiguity "thoughts" and "seeds", thus adding many layers of meaning to the sentence.

The third strophe presents the most complex pattern in the poem:

NP	the shrivelled seeds
VP AP	are split/on the path -
NP VP AP	the grass/bends/with dust,
NP VP	the grape / slips
AP	under its crackled leaf:
AP	yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
AP	and the blackened stalks of mint
NP VP NP AP	the poplar/is/bright/on the hill
NP VP	the poplar / spreads out
NP AP	deep-rooted / among trees.

Here we perceive again the equilibrium in the internal distribution of each sentence: two blocks are formed by NP VP NP AP, three by NP VP AP,

and two by AP (actually an appendix to the block NP VP NP AP) in this way foregrounding line twenty – “the poplar is bright on the hill” – by the placing of two Adverbial phrases in front of it, forming the compact block of lines eighteen to twenty. This block was already put into evidence at the graphological level, because of its longer lines. Now it is foregrounded as having the most complex sentence structure and it will also become conspicuous at the level of Semantics because of the introduction of a new paradigmatic order, the poplar, with its corresponding word modifiers, bringing a new theme into the poem: potency, brightness and wholeness.

The fourth strophe presents the same syntagmatic equilibrium as the others, with a slight incidence in the number of Noun Phrases and Adverbial Phrases:

NP VP NP	O poplar, you/ are/ great
AP	among the hill stones,
NP VP AP	while I/ perish/ on the path
AP	among the crevices of the rocks.

Lines twenty–four and –six are identical in structure, while lines twenty–three and –five present a variation in the predicate: the extended meaning of “are” demands a complement, “great”, in contrast to the intransitiveness of “perish”, a contrast that will be retaken at the Semantic Level.

Therefore, the syntagmatic equilibrium of the sentences accounts for N. H. Pearson’s comment that H.D.’s lines are not loose, but “open” (Dembo, 1969, p. 443). Concomitantly, parallelism, “one of the fundamental problems of poetry” is also brought to the surface to enhance the poetic quality of these syntagms, as “in poetry, not only the phonological sequence but any sequence of semantic units strives to build an equation. Similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its throughgoing symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence” (Jakobson, 1960, p. 370). Arranging the lines now according to their paralelistic effects, we have:

I am startled
 I am anguished – defeated
 I am scattered (twice)

A split leaf / crackles/ on the paved floor
 A slight wind / shakes / the seed–pods

My thoughts are spent

My thoughts tear me
My thoughts / are spent / as the black seeds
I /am scattered / like the hot shrivelled seeds

The grass/ bends/ with dust
The grape/ slips / under its crackled leaf

spent seed-pods
blackened stalks of mint

The poplar / is / bright / on the hill
The poplar / spreads out/ deep-rooted / among trees

O poplar, you / are / great / among the hill-stones
on the paved floor/on the path x on the hill (opposite directions)
among trees/among the hill-stones x among the crevices of the rocks (opposite directions)

trees x hill-stones/crevices of the rocks (plant x earth)

you are great/ among the hill-stones x I perish/ on the path, among the crevices of the rocks.

These parallelisms and contextual relationships, besides creating new patterns of similarity and contrast between the poet and nature, also highlight H.D.'s concern with space relationships. Although Hugh M. Lacey points out that "Typical spatial objects are the common things, that is, objects to which we refer as being 'in space' or having a spatial location. But other events, frequently called 'mental events' (perceptions, remembrances, wishes, sensations, experiences) cannot be attributed in the habitual sense, a spatial location" (1972, p. 19-20)".

H.D. has managed to give a spatial location to mental events, making them more palpable and more real to us, attached as they are to objects and places in nature. The poet's thoughts – like the seeds – are trapped in space. This concreteness is further enhanced by the significant absence of past or future time in the poem; everything is in the present, nothing "was" or "will be", thus concentrating our attention on the "here and now", which becomes even more emphatic and telling when contrasted with the unreachableness of the "far beyond poplar".

Entering now the Level of Semantics (cognitive meaning) – leading to the Total Significance of the poem – we shall also be working with the

symbolism attached to the meaning of each word, for "the single word, of course, can be both sign and symbol: the sign indicates the object, whereas the symbol allows of a conception of the object [...]; some symbols merge into a composition of dreams, of fantasy; others become a part of ritual or myth; still others become connotative parts [...] of artistic expressions, as in poetry." (O'Connor, 1948, p. 110–111). This procedure will also foreground the fact that, in spite of the Imagist credo present in the poem, H.D. transcends the limitations imposed on Imagism, that its "presentation, not representation" (O'Connor, p. 115), for her poetry is "hard and clear" on the surface, but on a deeper layer of significance it acquires overtones of meaning through the symbolism attached to her images, which cannot be wholly gratuitous or accidental, by what we know of her later work, such as in *Hermetic definition*. Therefore, H.D.'s ascension from word to image and symbol does not obliterate the objective language, but turns it ambiguous.

The "motif" of midday is presented in the first strophe as a destructive force, through its impact on the addresser – "the light beats upon me" – it strikes repeatedly, it hits upon the "I" with all its violence. The symbolic quality of sun light as creative force, irradiation, cosmic energy (Cirlot, 1969, p. 298),² is here seen as its negative, for midday sun becomes malefic to the addresser and to nature by the excess of its heat and illumination. This distorted symbolism of light, aggressive, oppressive, prostrating the poet and nature by the violence of its rays and concretized in the opposition "light/I" (already foregrounded at the phonological level), will thus become the semantic nucleus, the microcontext from which all other thought fragments will derive and from which all other negative images will irradiate.

The lyrical "I" in "I am startled" (which does not necessarily have to be identified with the poet, for it is a disposable "I"), initiates this derivative process with the first statement about the addresser himself. In sudden surprise or alarm, the addresser is shocked, and from a visual sensation of too much clarity we move to an auditory sensation in a "split leaf crackles on the paved floor", conveying the hot, dry air of midday, for only a dry leaf can be "split" and "crackled". This sound, nevertheless, seems to be too much to be endured, enhanced by the emotive quality of "split". Thus, the severe mental pain conveyed by "I am anguished" is related not only to the physical pain of "a split

2 All symbolic references in my analysis are taken from this dictionary.

leaf", but also to its emotive quality, while "defeated" implies the failure to defy the impact of midday's light and heat.

We can also observe here groups of lexemes which configure themselves by their semic content. A first group is formed by words indicating the tormented poet ("startled", "anguished", "defeated") while the contextual relationship "I/ split leaf" further indicts the addresser as a helpless victim of the sun's light and heat. "Split leaf" and also "crackled" start another group of lexemes, indicating metonymically the disintegration that is taking place in nature and in the poet: not only the leaf but also the addresser's thoughts are "split", they have lost their wholeness, a state already conveyed through sounds, graphology and syntax, and further confirmed by the "crackled" pattern in the poem. In counterpoint, the hardness of this first image is somehow moderated by "paved floor", with its suggestion of stones but also of leaves.

The fusion poet/nature/poem felt in the first strophe continues in the second, emphasized by the process image-sensation-image. "A slight wind shakes the seed-pods" iterates line one, in that it conveys to us a second natural agent, the wind, which belongs to the same semantic group as light, and which will start another derivative process – the scattering and whirling motion in the addresser's thoughts and in nature. Nevertheless, the wind, otherwise symbolizing creative breath or spirit, is here only "slight", it doesn't have the force to give fecundating power to the seeds, it only "shakes" or disturbs the seed-pods in which the latent forces of life are hidden.

"My thoughts are spent/as the black seeds" reinforces the idea of negativity in the poem, for the poet's power of thinking is "spent", consumed in the impact of midday. The simile "as the black seeds" confirms again the fusion poet-nature, for the seeds, debilitated by heat, have lost their hope of fecundation, together with their symbolic meaning of "latent forces, not yet manifest", and their black colour further corroborates this loss of force, as it corresponds to processes of disassimilation, passivity and debilitation. Light, as a positive value, has a malefic effect, just as black in its deepest meaning of "germination in obscurity" is also deprived of this force by the context of the poem.

"My thoughts tear me./ I dread their fever" repeats the idea of disintegration, anguish and heat provoked by midday sun: nature and poet are feverish, spent and torn by heat and wind, a motif that is again highlighted in the next three lines "I am scattered in its whirl./ I am scattered like/ the hot shrivelled seeds". Further, the fusion of feverish thoughts with hot, shrivelled seeds, once more made explicit by the simile, creates not only a very deep relationship between thoughts and seeds (both as genesis of creativity); it also creates the third virtual element born from the context of the poem, for images become

proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion, or by associated thoughts or images awakened by passion (Day Lewis, 1949, p. 20). Here the interpreting imagination acts in a double way: by fusing the imagery thought/seed, and by creating a poem whose visual form and rhythm correspond to the scattered thoughts and seeds. This image, incidentally, was a familiar one to H.D., as her words in a letter to F. S. Flint confirm: "I have been writing all morning and my thoughts are scattered as always" (*apud* Pondrom, 1969, p. 4). Thus, many possible associations can be made, because the poet's recreation includes both the object and the sensations connecting her with the object, both the facts and the tone of experience; "it is when object and sensation [...] breed an image in which both their likenesses appear, that something comes to us with an effect of revelation." (Day Lewis, 1949, p. 23).

The fact that the whirling motion in line ten – "I am scattered in its whirl" – refers back to "wind" in line five makes the reference become ambiguous, for we immediately associate "whirl" to "whirling thoughts and seeds", with further implications of spinning around, following each other in a bewildering succession. Heat, conveyed indirectly through "hot shrivelled seeds", instead of being related to the maturity of a process, biological or spiritual, is here destructive, by shrivelling up the dried seeds. Besides, heat is represented in solar emblems by alternate undulating and straight rays which correspond to the expression of light, and these two movements, from above to below, are also felt in the poem, as mentioned. Therefore, the whole second strophe continues this projection of the poet's inwardness through the presentation of a heat-oppressed nature, in a process of disintegration.

The oppressiveness of heat continues in the third strophe, as the list of metonymies is retaken in "the shrivelled seeds/ are split on the path", relating these lines to the precedent strophes and thus retrieving, by the repetition of "shrivelled seeds", "split" and "path", the circular movement and the feverish state of the poet's "whirling" thoughts. Two further parts of the paradigm "plant" appear in the following lines: the grass, which "bends with dust" – thus losing its symbolic natural powers – and the grape, "which slips under its crackled leaf" – deprived of its original symbolic power and fertility as a fruit – for both are submitted to the burning heat of midday: it castrates nature, making it barren, in the same way that its too intense brightness destroys and defeats the poet's thoughts and creative powers. Defeat is further corroborated by the negative symbolic meaning of "dust" – this state of maximum destruction, related to death – which covers the grass.

H.D.'s negative feelings toward midday's light and heat in this poem find a striking parallel to Baudelaire's attitude toward the sun – a "mot-clef" in his poetry – for he also

rédoute la violence accablante du soleil de midi, il hait l'intensité du feu solaire qui brûle, dessèche et dévore, qui exerce une action destructrice sur le monde et sur l'humanité. La chaleur de la lumière solsticiale signifie, non la quiétude, mais la défaite, la ruine; l'éclat torride du soleil suggère le sentiment de la désolation et de l'accablement, il répand à travers l'espace 'des ardents parfums', annocateurs de la mort (Eigeldinger, 1967, p.361)

Moreover, if we remember H.D.'s statement about evening time – "as I had often said to him [Freud] that that near-evening hour was almost my favourite of the whole day." (H.D., 1956, p. 2) – we realize once more the similarity in the outlook of both poets: "Aux périls du feu solaire et à l'intensité du flamboiement, image de la mort destructrice, [...] [il] préfère la splendeur du crépuscule, les moments où l'éclat de la lumière est cerné d'ombre ou commence à décliner." (Eigeldinger, 1967, p. 362).

Nevertheless, the oppressive effect of heat re-echoed in lines eighteen–nineteen – the "spent seed-pods" and the "blackened stalks of mint", both plants also deprived of their symbolic powers of fertility, growth, and of their synaesthetical appeal of colour and perfume – already seems to be weakened by the presence of the poplar from line twenty onwards, for the poplar introduces a change in the poem's tone which goes up to the end of the strophe. The associative process poet–nature apparent in the first two strophes remains in the background here, to introduce the shift of emphasis in the addresser's thoughts from herself to the poplar – the new motif – as also from nearness to a distance which is beyond her reach.

As a tree, the poplar represents in a larger sense the life of the cosmos, equal to immortality, as inexhaustible life. By its evocative power of strength because of its large size, straightness of trunk and deep green leaves, the poplar is qualified as "bright", "deep-rooted" and "great": it has vivid colours, in contrast to the black seeds and blackened stalks of mint, it reflects light instead of becoming spent by the sun, and has its roots firmly fixed in the ground from where it gets nourishment. As it is also large beyond the ordinary, it implies wholeness and power, while by its verticality, it corresponds to an impulse of spiritualization, in counterpoint to the flatness and lowness of seeds, grass and

leaves, and the depressed thoughts of the poet. The symbolism derived from its vertical form as an axis which conducts a subterranean life up to heaven, could also imply the unity with sky and earth the poet cannot attain. This unreachability is further corroborated by the fact that the poplar is on a hill, which has symbolical associations of meditation and spiritual elevation by its height, verticality, mass and form. Therefore, the introduction of the poplar, besides creating a parameter of meaning by pointing to a distant world where creative force is, could also emphasize the poet's need to see beyond her own reality.

Moreover, the presentation of the different parts of a plant and, in particular, of the shrivelled seeds as a metaphor of disintegration, opposed to the wholeness of the poplar, also establishes a link of causality between the two worlds of the poem. This link becomes evident, not just because both worlds are contrasted in the last strophe, but because if we sum up all these symbolic meanings related to vegetal life we realize that the first part of the poem is filled with "growth" images which are inverted, for they function destructively, a process which began with the micro-context "the light beats upon me" and continued up to "and the blackened stalks of mint".

The fourth strophe begins with a vocative which completes the poet's vision of the tree: "O poplar, you are great/among the hill-stones". The closeness of "hill-stones", "path", "crevices" and "rocks", enhanced the symbolism behind their common semantic feature "earth", foregrounds once more the contrast poplar/poet, for the place where she stands is in the "crevices of the rocks": otherwise associated with solidity, rocks are here presented as having crevices, a symbol of depth, a place from where there is actually no escape, thus suggesting again the complete defeat of the "I" and retrieving once more the "crackled" lineation which permeates the first part of the poem. On the other hand, the hardness and duration of the stones, high upon the hill, makes man see in them unity and force, contrary to the laws of biological life which are submitted to change and death, and also contrary to dust, which – as seen – is an aspect of disaggregation and defeat. The hill is thus again a relevant image to appear together with the poplar, increasing the feeling of distance which separates the poplar from the poet.

Two different movements arise again from these associations: one ascensional, from genesis (seed) to consummation (poplar), and one descending, from "beats upon" to "perish". These two movements, apparent in different "scenes" or "images" in the first strophe, became mingled in the second and third strophes, to reach their climax in strophe four with the final contrast between the greatness of the poplar versus the obscurity and annihilation of the "I", who perishes – like the seeds – without completing her journey to fruition.

Thus, the initial theme of depression and defeat is retaken in the last two lines, bringing the addresser back to her hard and dire reality, to the realization of her defeat: flight is impossible, she will never reach the unattainable and ideal world of the poplar. As a consequence, the last two lines also present the opposite of personification, for the addresser loses her "persona" by identifying herself with the seeds, her identity is completely "scattered" as she descends from her position as master of nature to be transformed into a "thing". The lyrical "I", placed at the beginning of the lines in the first and second strophes, together with "my thoughts", is removed from its initial position to become identified with the earth, with dust, the annihilation of the poet thus ending the semantic process which began in line one.

Concluding this linguistic analysis, which has highlighted the verbal complexity of "Mid-day" through the examination of the levels of Realization, Form, and Semantics in order to reach its Total Significance, we realize that the correlations that were established among the levels lead to an aesthetic perception of the poem not yet accounted for. Although Bernard Engel, for instance, has called "Mid-day" a blurred-focus poem, "failing because attention waves between the physical setting and the speaker's own feelings", and further, that the first and second strophes are weak ("though the grammar is correct, the subject change and the idea of the speaker's 'fever' having a 'whirl' in which to scatter thoughts seems imprecise"), we can see, through our analysis, how these critical comments lose their relevance. A more positive judgement is given by Engel to the third and fourth strophes, which he very aptly has called "a haiku-like contrast of tree and speaker"(Engel, 1969, p. 511-513).

This commentary also reminds us of the Oriental influence on Imagist verse, for the description of Chinese landscape paintings directs us to a seminal aspect of H.D.'s attitude in "Mid-day" – not only the poet's integration with the elements, but the complete subordination of man to nature:

Complete mastery of Chinese painting lies in the identification of the experimenter with the experienced, a state of mind in which the artist [...] relives the life of the object to be painted [...]. In the landscape paintings of noted masters we often find human figures dwarfed into insignificance by awe-inspiring mountain peaks, running streams and well poised tall trees with their gnarled roots and twisted branches suggestive of the strength and power of untamed Nature in an exaggerated proportion" (Lee, p. 300-301).

Maybe H.D.'s tendency for escapism from her own inwardness – which makes her turn to the permanence of the world of nature – can explain why in "Mid-day" the human is so painfully diminished to achieve this oneness expressed in the Taoist teaching "One with Nature and the Universe". Simultaneously, leaving aside her classical Hellenic themes otherwise a constant in her work, H.D. has created an intensely personal poem. As she herself has told N.H. Pearson, her nature poetry "was never really Greek but came from her childhood reminiscences of Watch Hill and the coasts of Rhode Island and Maine, which she used to visit with her friends as a child" (Dembo, 1969, p. 437).

In this way, "Mid-day" can be included in a certain context of H.D.'s work: her loneliness in front of nature, which is a metaphysical estrangement that confronts her at every moment with the perilous condition of her own identity (Riddel, 1969, p. 447) and which makes her want to identify with, or lose her identity in, nature, by integrating herself with the elements. As C. Day Lewis confirms – speaking about the poetic image which returns to the collective consciousness for its sanction – it is "the very nature of the image – of poetry in its metaphorical aspect – [which] invokes that consciousness, as though man even at his most individual, still seeks emotional reassurance from the sense of community, not with his fellow-beings alone, but with whatever is living in the universe, and with the dead." (1949, p. 32).

Yet this natural world presented in the poem and so perfectly integrated in the restrictive poetics of the Imagist Credo, is a world that becomes, ultimately, independent from the limits of time and space, through the very words of the poem, which recreate their own space and time by their sound, syntax and meaning, as H.D. transforms the reality of her words into the ideality of a poem.

RESUMO

Após situar H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) dentro do movimento imagista, este artigo apresenta uma abordagem lingüística de um de seus primeiros poemas, "Mid-day", a fim de resgatar algumas de suas características que não foram detectadas pelos críticos e assim levar a uma reavaliação.

Palavras-chave: H.D., imagismo, poesia norte-americana (séc. XX).

ABSTRACT

After reviewing H.D.'s career inside the Imagist movement, this article presents a linguistic reading of one of her early nature poems, "Mid-day", in order to retrieve some of its features which have not been noticed by critics, in this way leading to a reevaluation of the poem.

Key-words: H.D., Imagism, North-American poetry (XXth century).

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