

O39 H.D., 'Eurydice', 1917^o

H.D. is the pen name of Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961, American-born poet and novelist, living in Britain and Europe from 1911. In her early years she was an important member of the 'Imagist' school (which also included Pound and Lawrence), and her poetry is characterised by intense sensuous imagery and a repetitive, incantatory style. Throughout her career, from early poems like 'Eurydice' down to *Helen in Egypt* (1964), she was passionately devoted to ancient Greece and its mythology.

Eurydice

1

So you have swept me back,
 I who could have walked with the live souls
 above the earth,
 I who could have slept among the live flowers
 5 at last;

so for your arrogance
 and your ruthlessness
 I am swept back
 where dead lichens drip
 10 dead cinders upon moss of ash;

so for your arrogance
 I am broken at last,
 I who had lived unconscious,
 who was almost forgot;
 15 if you had let me wait
 I had grown from listlessness
 into peace,
 if you had let me rest with the dead,
 I had forgot you
 20 and the past.

2

Here only flame upon flame
 and black among the red sparks,
 streaks of black and light
 grown colourless;

^o from *Collected Poems 1912–1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz, New York: New Directions, 1983. © 1982 by The Estate of Hilda Doolittle. Reprinted by permission of Carcanet Press Ltd and New Directions Publishing Corporation.

- 25 why did you turn back,
that hell should be reinhabited
of myself thus
swept into nothingness?
- why did you turn?
- 30 why did you glance back?
why did you hesitate for that moment?
why did you bend your face
caught with the flame of the upper earth,
above my face?
- 35 what was it that crossed my face
with the light from yours
and your glance?
what was it you saw in my face?
the light of your own face,
- 40 the fire of your own presence?
- What had my face to offer
but reflex of the earth,
hyacinth colour
caught from the raw fissure in the rock
- 45 where the light struck,
and the colour of azure crocuses
and the bright surface of gold crocuses
and of the wind-flower,
swift in its veins as lightning
- 50 and as white.

3

- Saffron from the fringe of the earth,
wild saffron that has bent
over the sharp edge of earth,
all the flowers that cut through the earth,
- 55 all, all the flowers are lost;
- everything is lost,
everything is crossed with black,
black upon black
and worse than black,
- 60 this colourless light.

4

Fringe upon fringe
of blue crocuses,

crocuses, walled against blue of themselves,
 blue of that upper earth,
 65 blue of the depth upon depth of flowers,
 lost;
 flowers,
 if I could have taken once my breath of them,
 enough of them,
 70 more than earth,
 even than of the upper earth,
 had passed with me
 beneath the earth;
 if I could have caught up from the earth,
 75 the whole of the flowers of the earth,
 if once I could have breathed into myself
 the very golden crocuses
 and the red,
 and the very golden hearts of the first saffron,
 80 the whole of the golden mass,
 the whole of the great fragrance,
 I could have dared the loss.

5

So for your arrogance
 and your ruthlessness
 85 I have lost the earth
 and the flowers of the earth,
 and the live souls above the earth,
 and you who passed across the light
 and reached
 90 ruthless;
 you who have your own light,
 who are to yourself a presence,
 who need no presence;
 yet for all your arrogance
 95 and your glance,
 I tell you this:
 such loss is no loss,
 such terror, such coils and strands and pitfalls
 of blackness,
 100 such terror
 is no loss;

hell is no worse than your earth
 above the earth,
 hell is no worse,
 105 no, nor your flowers
 nor your veins of light
 nor your presence,
 a loss;

 my hell is no worse than yours
 110 though you pass among the flowers and speak
 with the spirits above earth.

6

Against the black
 I have more fervour
 than you in all the splendour of that place,
 115 against the blackness
 and the stark grey
 I have more light;

 and the flowers,
 if I should tell you,
 120 you would turn from your own fit paths
 toward hell,
 turn again and glance back
 and I would sink into a place
 even more terrible than this.

7

125 At least I have the flowers of myself,
 and my thoughts, no god
 can take that;
 I have the fervour of myself for a presence
 and my own spirit for light;

 130 and my spirit with its loss
 knows this;
 though small against the black,
 small against the formless rocks,
 hell must break before I am lost;

 135 before I am lost,
 hell must open like a red rose
 for the dead to pass.