

H.D.'s "Loss" from *Sea Garden* (1916)

The sea called—
you faced the estuary,
you were drowned as the tide passed.—
I am glad of this—
at least you have escaped. 5

The heavy sea-mist stifles me.
I choke with each breath—
a curious peril, this—
the gods have invented
curious torture for us. 10

One of us, pierced in the flank,
dragged himself across the marsh,
he tore at the bay-roots,
lost hold on the crumbling bank—

Another crawled—too late— 15
for shelter under the cliffs.

I am glad the tide swept you out,
O beloved,
you of all this ghastly host
alone untouched, 20
your white flesh covered with salt
as with myrrh and burnt iris.

We were hemmed in this place,
so few of us, so few of us to fight
their sure lances, 25
the straight thrust—effortless
with slight life of muscle and shoulder.

So straight—only we were left,
the four of us—somehow shut off.

And the marsh dragged one back, 30
and another perished under the cliff,
and the tide swept you out.

Your feet cut steel on the paths,
I followed for the strength
of life and grasp. 35
I have seen beautiful feet
but never beauty welded with strength.
I marvelled at your height.

You stood almost level
with the lance-bearers 40
and so slight.

And I wondered as you clasped
your shoulder-strap
at the strength of your wrist
and the turn of your young fingers, 45
and the lift of your shorn locks,
and the bronze
of your sun-burnt neck.

All of this,
and the curious knee-cap, 50
fitted above the wrought greaves,
and the sharp muscles of your back
which the tunic could not cover—
the outline
no garment could deface. 55

I wonder if you knew how I watched,
how I crowded before the spearsmen—
but **the gods** wanted you,
the gods wanted you back.