

"THE WIND HAD RUFFLED HER PETAL": H.D.'S FLORAL IDENTITY

by

JULIE BREMICK MINCHEW

(Under the Direction of Carl Rapp)

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes H.D.'s first volume of poetry *Sea Garden* and her three autobiographical prose texts that make up the "Madrigal cycle": *HERmione*, *Asphodel*, and *Paint It Today*. The personal narratives were written in the 1920s, but all were published posthumously. However, these novels portray H.D.'s life around the time of her writing *Sea Garden* (1916). Although the early verse collection has been studied and examined more than any other H.D. work, the autobiographical prose has yet to be sufficiently analyzed in relation to the Imagist poetry. The following research and analysis focuses on similarities with botanical imagery in both the early poetry and the particular prose. This floral profusion exemplifies an overarching theme in H.D.'s oeuvre, but also serves as H.D.'s vehicle of personal expression. The placement of the autobiographical prose in dialogue with the *Sea Garden* collection portrays a new personal view of H.D.'s "impersonal" lyrics.

INDEX WORDS: Hilda Doolittle, H.D., Flowers, *Sea Garden*, Sexuality, Femininity, Identity, Ezra Pound, Imagism, Modernist Poetry, *HERmione*, *Asphodel*, *Paint It Today*

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A.B., University of Georgia, 2004

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2007

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I want to thank Dr. Carl Rapp for his patience, criticism, and advice on all aspects of my thesis process. Also, thank you to my other committee members, Dr. Aidan Wasley and Dr. Roxanne Eberle. I appreciate your support, understanding, and challenging criticism. My fellow Masters friends provided me with immense amounts of support, reinforcement, and much needed distractions. Connell Sullivant, Amanda Wescom, Julie Tyler, Matt Kaminski, Nicole Lobdell, and Willis Leitner, thank you. I don't know what I would have done without you. A special thanks to Connell Sullivant for being a great friend, amazing officemate, and personal support system. You rock, rock. Also, a special thanks to Amanda Wescom. Thank you for answering my erratic phone calls at all times of the day and night. Your encouraging remarks, friendship, and genuine interest in my work kept me on track and hopeful. In addition to my committee, I also want to thank Dr. John Vance for always supporting me in my English studies at UGA. You are a wonderful mentor. My family also has been extremely helpful and always supportive of everything I do. Mom, Dad, and Jamie, thank you and I love you. I am also lucky to have a wonderful roommate, Hastings Beard, who has served as my sounding board since the beginning of graduate school. Thank you for tolerating my idiosyncratic behavior and tendency for late night conversations. Finally, I want to give a special thanks to Parker Gispert. When I didn't feel or care like going anymore, you got me through it. You are the most positive force in my life. Thank you. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

T.S. Eliot famously explains, in his “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things” (Eliot 10-11). Hilda Doolittle, one of Eliot’s female contemporaries, had a complex personality of emotions that needed to be escaped. Known for her role as the “best Imagist” writer, Hilda Doolittle, or rather ‘H.D.,’ followed Eliot’s advice on poetry. Her early lyrical poems remain fragmented, disembodied, and very impersonal. However, in a 1925 letter to George Plank, H.D. confesses, “the things I write are all indirectly (when not directly) inspired by my experiences.” So, how can her poetry be both impersonal and personal at the same time? Are the disembodied lyrics actually representing a disembodied poet? In this study, I try to answer these questions.

Hilda Doolittle’s unsettling biography reveals a constant shifting and changing of selves. She was born in 1886 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, daughter of an astronomy professor and an art teacher. She attended Bryn Mawr college for only two years due to failing grades. She met Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams as a teenager and remained close friends with the two poets for years, with her friendship eventually culminating in a somewhat intermittent engagement with Pound in her twenties. The engagement remained rocky, Pound left for Europe, and H.D. met and fell in love with

Frances Josepha Gregg. In 1911, she went abroad to England with Gregg and Gregg's mother and reunited with Pound. Their relationship soon proved to be nothing more than friendship, and he introduced her to other members of the literary circle in London. It was during this year that she showed her poems to Pound and the Imagist movement took shape. H.D. recalls this particular moment in her book about her relationship with Pound, *End to Torment*:

“But Dryad,” (in the Museum tea room), “this is poetry.” He slashed with a pencil. “Cut this out, shorten this line. ‘Hermes of the Ways’ is a good title. I’ll send this to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*. Have you a copy? Yes? Then we can send this, or I’ll type it when I get back. Will this do? And he scrawled “H.D. Imagiste” at the bottom of the page. (18).

Thus, the Imagist movement had begun, and Hilda Doolittle, a Morvarian girl from Pennsylvania had been transformed into the ambiguous and genderless initials, ‘H.D.’ Gregg eventually went back to America and shocked H.D. with the news of her marriage to lecturer Louis Wilkinson. H.D. soon met and married fellow Imagist poet Richard Aldington in 1913, but she consistently described Gregg as the love of her life. The next couple of years were turbulent for H.D.; World War I broke out, and she suffered the stillbirth of her and Aldington's child. However, her first volume of poetry, *Sea Garden*, was published among such devastating events in 1916. With this publication, H.D. was soon recognized as the model Imagist poet and received literary status among her contemporaries. The short, tight lyrics of *Sea Garden* adhere to the Imagist principles Pound defined and advised poets to follow:

Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.

Don't use such an expression as "dim lands *of peace*." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the adequate symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions...(Pound 5)

In *Sea Garden*, H.D.'s natural objects provide adequate symbols, leaving her images concrete and crystalline. Some early critics even characterized them as "cold, passionless," and from the work of a "frozen lesbian" (qtd. in Friedman 53). The descriptions, however, do not provide an accurate categorical account of the poems. I will show this in the next chapter.

Aldington and H.D. soon separated after six years of marriage and his openly adulterous relationships. H.D. then met and became pregnant by the musician Cecil Gray. He soon left her while pregnant, and she suffered a terrible case of influenza, which almost killed her and her unborn child. During this period of illness and fragile existence, H.D. met Bryher (Winifred Ellerman), the woman with whom she would spend the rest of her life. Bryher helped H.D. through illness and depression, while H.D. simultaneously prevented Bryher from suicide. Both women claimed the other saved her life. H.D.'s daughter Frances Perdita was born in 1919, and H.D. began to write and publish her second volume of poetry and numerous autobiographical narratives. During the 1930s, H.D. continued to write and publish prose and poetry, participated in cinema,¹ and became Freud's analysand. World War II soon broke out, and H.D. and Bryher survived the London Blitz, which her epic poem *Trilogy* illustrates. She wrote her second major poem, *Helen in Egypt* in the early 1950s. Although both H.D. and Bryher experimented

¹ H.D. played Astrid in Kenneth Macpherson's film *Borderline* (1930). The film portrays characters in psychic and racial borderlines. H.D. published an essay on the particular film in the magazine *Close Up*.

and flirted with many men, the two women remained intimate companions until H.D.'s death in Switzerland in 1961.

Although H.D.'s first collection of poetry *Sea Garden* (1916) remains her most famous and most often studied piece of work, it is the subject of this particular analysis. Numerous critics have focused on H.D.'s early Imagist volume, but none specifically in relation to her autobiographical prose. H.D. referred to the events and experiences in her life at the time around the World War I and her three narratives that retell them as the "Madrigal cycle" (Friedman 137). Written in the decade following the Great War, "The Madrigal Cycle" consists of autobiographical memoirs *Paint It Today* (comp. 1921), *Asphodel* (comp. 1922), and *HERmione* (comp. 1927). These particular dates refer to the completion of the manuscripts. The texts were published posthumously decades after they were written and after H.D.'s death; *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* (1992); *HERmione* (1981). These novels focus on H.D.'s life during the time period between 1905-1918, including the time she was writing and publishing *Sea Garden*. Therefore, the early Imagist volume may be correlated with this "cycle" of novels. H.D. retells the events, experiences, and emotions that helped create the *Sea Garden* collection. The autobiographical prose sheds new light on the early lyrics, and serves as companion texts to decipher H.D.'s identity as both a poet and as a woman torn between heterosexuality and homosexuality. *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *HERmione* give readers a kind of "behind the scenes" view at *Sea Garden*, ultimately revealing the poet behind the "impersonal" masks of the early Imagist.

H.D.'s *Sea Garden* consists of a collection of pastorals, but these poems do not strictly follow the traditional notions of the pastoral genre. Some critics define the

pastoral as “any work which represents a withdrawal to a place apart that is close to the elemental rhythms of nature, where the protagonist achieves a new perspective on the complexities, frustrations, and conflicts of the social world” (Abrams 203). The pastoral also has been defined as a “deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting” (Abrams 202). Although *Sea Garden* transcends the boundaries of time and space, these pastorals of H.D.’s do not illustrate peace or simplicity. Instead, the lyrics display the rural landscape as inimical and antagonistic. Wind, land, and sea violently clash in the poems, showing the more forceful and damaging side of nature. H.D.’s pastoral poetry are anything but “deliberately conventional poems.” Instead, she deliberately breaks the convention of the pastoral genre. H.D. uses the genre to set up an opposition between the cultural (or social) order and the natural world, precipitating the poet into an imaginary real of timelessness. One can follow the trajectory of a day with the poems “Mid-day,” “Evening,” and “Nights,” but those remain the only presence of conventional time in this volume. Flowers, fruit, rocks, waves, gardens, and cliffs denote space. The poems illustrate a world completely separated from social order. H.D. expresses this fascination of hers with this imaginary world in *Tribute to Freud*: “Past, present, future, these three-but there is another time-element popularly called the fourth-dimensional” (32). *Sea Garden* and the autobiographical prose transcend past, present, and future and inhabit this “fourth dimensional” element.

The events at the beginning of the twentieth century tore H.D. and so many others in her generation out of a private world of imagination and into the public realm of

history and all its nightmares (Friedman 137). The lyrics in *Sea Garden*, the novels of the Madrigal cycle, however, transport H.D. (and her readers) out of present time and space. Her switch from lyric to narrative, however, does not entirely represent a change in image. As Friedman explains, the term “madrigal” evokes “in the midst of war, the image of a lyric form associated with Elizabethan love songs in timeless pastoral settings” (137). Ironically, the autobiographical fiction of the 1920s manifests itself in the same genre of the poems in *Sea Garden*. Thus, this pastoral allusion furthers the link between the two literary collections.

Although all three novels allude to the events of H.D.’s life during the period between 1905-1918, each narrative focuses on more specific experiences and remains structurally unique from the others. H.D.’s novel *HERmione* remains the most significant autobiographical prose in comparison with the early verse collection. This novel tells the story of Hermione, or Her Gart, and her torn relationships between Fayne Rabb (Frances Josepha Gregg) and George Lowndes (Ezra Pound). The story begins with Hermione’s nascent love with George and eventual affair with Fayne: “One I love, two I love” (40). The tangle of emotions between homosexual desires and heterosexual attraction engulf the entire story. H.D. also portrays her early childhood in a Victorian society and a Morvarian household. Hermione’s relationship with her parents, Eugenia and Carl, reflect the somewhat turbulent association H.D. had with her parents. They both disapproved of her relationship with Pound and with Francis Gregg, calling her “dangerous.” The story ends with Her’s transatlantic crossing with Fayne and the beginnings of Her’s expatriatism.

Paint It Today picks up where *HERmione* leaves off, beginning with the two women in the Louvre in Paris examining the famous “Hermaphrodite” statue. H.D. frames *Paint It Today* by lesbian love; the first chapters focus on H.D.’s relationship with Francis Gregg and retell her transatlantic crossing to Europe, and the last chapters illustrate H.D.’s meeting with Bryher and their budding romance. Unlike *HERmione*, *Paint It Today* mainly follows the years after H.D.’s arrival in Europe. *Asphodel* begins similarly with H.D.’s trip abroad with Gregg and her mother. It follows her trip from France to London where she meets up with Pound, who introduces her to his literary circle of friends in London. The narrative then jumps to 1915 with the retelling of the events surrounding the stillbirth of her child and the dissolution of her marriage with Richard Aldington. Her affair with Cecil Gray, the pregnancy (and birth) of Perdita, and her new lesbian love with Bryher all surface in the second half. With the second part’s emphasis on the later years of the Great War, I am mostly concerned with only the first half of the novel in relation to this particular study.

Like the floral poems in *Sea Garden*, the novels of the Madrigal cycle repeat and overlap each other. This repetition parallels the inevitable repeating of history. The continuous cycle of retelling and remembering in both the prose and *Sea Garden* show H.D.’s attempt to rather remember the events and not necessarily repeat them, especially the Great War and her complex relationships with men and women. The repetition serves as a way for her to analyze, sort out, and work through her emotions.

The paradoxical relationships of opposites recur throughout H.D.’s literary oeuvre. However, these peculiar junctions are never more prominent as they are in *Sea Garden* and in the early narratives. Through the use of erotic landscapes, botanical

allusions, and natural elements, the poems and the prose illustrate an expression of H.D.'s identity at the beginning of her literary career that ultimately criticizes the traditional notions of femininity, breaks the narrow Imagist doctrine, and blurs boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual. The title of the poetry collection *Sea Garden* depicts an oxymoronic junction of both sea and land.

However, the most significant and dominant similarity between the poems of *Sea Garden* and the personal narratives is the floral imagery. In this study, I provide a detailed analysis of the particular poems in *Sea Garden* that demonstrate the prevalent recurring floral imagery, and I place these poems in relation to scenes in her autobiographical prose that parallel the poems. Looking at the early volume of poetry in light of the novels of "Madrigal cycle," one can conclude that the flowers in the poems are indeed a representation of H.D. The flowers symbolize H.D.'s exploration of her own identity as a woman at the turn of the century, poet confined to the narrow Imagist doctrine², female writer in a male-dominated milieu, life long expatriate, and bisexual. I provide a brief overview of floral imagery in literary tradition and in nineteenth century's perception of women. Both depict associations of flowers with women and traditional beauty. This is important to highlight because H.D. tends to experiment with conventions. She incorporates traditional symbols and conventional beliefs in order to break them. This particular reversal and paradox exemplify the pride she has in her difference as a woman, a female poet, and also an Imagist. The narratives, like the poems, contain similar junctions of opposite landscapes. The comparisons between H.D.'s autobiographical novels and her poems in *Sea Garden* situate the "impersonal" lyrics in

² Most of H.D.'s critics believe that she created what is known as the Imagist style, but Pound was the one who labeled the poems Imagism and developed the doctrine.

intimate, personal narratives. Thus, the novels help personalize the lyric poems. The prose gives the poems new life. The novels release H.D. from behind the masks, and finally allow that “turning loose of emotion,” invalidating the aesthetics that inform the Imagist poems.

CHAPTER 2

H.D.'S FLORAL IDENTITY

Flowers of Tradition

Flowers and gardens have served as subjects of reflection and identification for writers for numerous centuries. The incorporation of botanical vernacular and horticulture imagery in literature dates back to the early writings of Greece and continue to exist in the contemporary writings of today. Since classical times, flowers have functioned as tropes for the writer's most intimate feelings and emotions in verse, illustrating an abundance of flower personification in literature. Beverly Seaton asserts that "writers of the classical period related flowers to persons almost exclusively in the biological mode;" she further explains, "flowers are seen to represent persons in their relations to nature, in their sexual roles, in the place of mankind in the cosmos" (Seaton 680). These flower personifications have surfaced throughout the literary canon and culminated in the nineteenth century. Flowers, particularly in the Victorian era, "took on great significance in the domestic, social, and intellectual lives of the people, and found full expression in the arts and the literature of the period." This upsurge of botanical personification in nineteenth-century literature displays an attempt to place man back in nature, by showing him that "nature represents human emotions and situations." (Seaton 697). Nevertheless, this "great age of the flower garden" declined with the turn of the century.

Most twentieth-century authors broke away from these conventional rural poetic landscapes, contemplating more urban settings; Eliot's "half-deserted streets" eventually replaced Tennyson's "Isle of Fruits." However, H.D.'s first volume of poetry depicts these pastoral settings of earlier literature and more importantly, it incorporates flowers as the dominant image. The volume, *Sea Garden* emphasizes the importance of the floral imagery, and five of the poems illustrate specific flowers in their titles: "Sea Rose," "Sea Lily," "Sea Poppies," "Sea Violet," and "Sea Iris." There are also two garden poems: "Garden" and "Sheltered Garden." This early volume of poetry can be seen as a kind of garden itself, containing a variety of flower-like poems. This floral motif links H.D. to literary tradition, but there is nothing conventional about her flowers. Her flowers do not depict an idealized natural setting of the pastorals, but rather a violent one. Her flowers remain broken, abused, and neglected images, emphasizing her separation from the literary tradition. Her flowers, like her poems, break boundaries. However, the barriers H.D. dissolves display more than just her literary identity. The flowers also represent her female identity as well, and its ultimate nonconformity with Victorian ideals.

Although flowers have sometimes been connected with man, they are primarily associated with woman. The correlation of the two has been so commonplace that, "the basis for the fact that flowers usually signify women is reality" (Norrman and Haarberg 14). In Roman mythology, Flora was the goddess of flowers (her Greek double was Chloris). Even since the thirteenth century when scholars examined passages from the Bible's Song of Solomon, flowers have been linked to women. The lines, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys," have been interpreted for centuries as a reference to the Virgin Mary. Since then, representations of Mary in art have frequently included white

lilies for purity and roses for love and beauty (Stott 61). This link between femininity and the flower image can be traced throughout the history of Western literature and culture, and the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was no exception. Numerous etiquette books, ladies magazines, and journals of the late nineteenth century further foster the association of women and flowers. Women were encouraged to emulate flowers in smell, appearance, movement, touch, and in some instances intellect. In the 1894 etiquette manual *Manners, Culture, and the Dress of the Best American Society* Wells asserts, “the very perfection of elegance is to imitate nature” (Wells 10). He further advises men to remember that women “are like moss-roses, and are the most beautiful in spirit and in intellect, when they are but half-unfolded” (Wells 77). The comparison of females to flowers continues to flourish as the manual advises women to never refuse a dance invitation by men, unless they want to be known as “wall-flowers” (Wells 120). These advice manuals emphasize the aesthetic roles middle and upper-class women, like flowers, were supposed to play: “Beauty, unquestionably, is the master-charm of that sex” (Wells 441). This manual’s use of botanical terminology to describe women is very representative of Victorian society’s view of women at the time and emphasizes the association of conventional femininity and flowers. Women were to exist as aesthetic objects, and the modeling of themselves as flowers attained this cultural notion of femininity. The ideal feminine gesture was to mimic a flower that which blows lightly in the breeze, suggesting soft, graceful movements for women (Stott, 70). H.D. dramatically manipulates this cultural depiction of women as that which is moved by a gentle, subtle breeze in many of her *Sea Garden* poems. H.D. portrays the wind as a violent force,

whirling and scattering her flowers and symbolizing a more liberating quality. Her sea flowers represent her freedom from the confines of Victorian femininity.

Furthermore, American visual art at the end of the nineteenth century began to see a trend in “floral-female paintings,” in which the artist placed a woman or several women in a setting completely surrounded by flowers. The artist then arranged the visual elements to make the women appear very much like the flowers in the backdrop. This blurring of females and flowers in the paintings at this time encouraged both women and men to associate feminine beauty with floral plants. These “floral-female paintings” captured the traditional Victorian definition of femininity in America at the turn of the century (Stott 61-62).

As Stott points out, the 1911 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined a flower as “a term popularly used for the bloom or blossom of a plant, and so by analogy for the fairest, choicest, or finest part of anything” (67). This vague definition of the flower exemplifies the floral analogies given to women, who were considered at time the fairest “part” of humanity. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it was not uncommon for parents to name their daughters after flowers. Picking names resembled a walk through garden. The literature of the time reflected this floral naming practice: Henry James’s “Flora” in *The Turn of the Screw* and his “Daisy Miller,” and Edith Wharton’s “Lilly Bart” in *The House of Mirth*. Besides, *Sea Garden*, two later volumes of H.D.’s work illustrate the floral theme: *Red Roses for Bronze*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*. Botanical allusions shape H.D.’s literary career, but they are never more abundant than in the early verse and in the narratives of the 1920s.

In all three autobiographical texts, H.D.'s characters situate themselves around flowers and forests. Although none of her characters take the name of a specific blossom, most of the women in her personal narratives display floral qualities and descriptions. The characterizations illustrate H.D.'s feelings towards the individual. In *Asphodel*, Hermione describes Fayne like a flower: "She's like a great yellow rose" (19). Hermione also characterizes Mary Dalton (Brigit Patmore) as a flower:

A petunia. Not a flower of her preference but Hermione liked to see a thing being itself. A petunia. Not a flower of her preference but with autumn richness, no fragrance, rather heady with all but right, doing the right thing. A petunia would. The petunia seemed to know everyone, seemed to know everything. (44)

This specific flower and description serve to reveal Hermione's feelings toward Mary Dalton. Hermione's dislike of petunias signifies her dislike of Mary. She seems a little wary of Mary's (and the petunia's) inclination to do the right thing. In *HERmione*, Hermione also associates George Lowndes's mother with this particular flower. George's mother calls the color of carpet "petunia," and George says, "She likes the word petunia." The young girl replies, "I should imagine your mother would like the word petunia" (107). No petunias inhabit the landscapes of *Sea Garden*. However, flowers that consistently "do the right thing" surface as oppositions to the wild, dissonant flowers H.D. prefers.

Hermione also uses flowers to represent the difference of Fayne from traditional femininity: "Poor lovely, beautiful, sulky misplaced Fayne Rabb. Fayne was so lovely, lovelier than all this if she would only let herself be. She wouldn't let herself, let anyone

be lovely. Not lovely as flowers are. As flowers must always be” (46). H.D. suggests here the association between ideal feminine beauty and flowers. Although she uses the popular Victorian trope of flowers, she manipulates it to show her liberation from the stereotypical image as shown in the following analysis.

H.D.’s Flowers

In *Asphodel*, George tells Hermione: “You needn’t worry about your book of etiquette, dear Dryad. Don’t be so provincial” (42). She took this advice. In *Sea Garden*, H.D. takes these traditional notions of femininity and its association with flowers and spins them. The first poem (and flower) in the volume is “Sea Rose.” This short, sixteen-line lyric introduces and establishes H.D.’s theme of floral profusion, while exhibiting a model Imagist poem. The poem provides a kind of literary snapshot of the sea rose with each stanza, visually revealing its complex identity. The first stanza presents the physical characteristics of the flower:

Rose, harsh rose
 marred and with stint of petals,
 meager flower, thin,
 sparse of leaf,

The poem begins with the speaker addressing the rose. This direct acknowledgement emphasizes the important role the particular flower plays as an image in the poem, and therefore the role of femininity as well. This flower however does not display the traditional image of the delicate, beautiful rose. It is still fragile, but also “harsh” and “marred,” portraying damage and a lack of richness. The first line recalls the beginning of Blake’s poem “Sick Rose”: “O rose, thou art sick!” Both poems provide a reinterpretation

of the traditional rose symbol. This similarity of suffering floral images links the “Sea Rose” to literary tradition, but it also serves to emphasize the poem’s eventual rebellion of convention. The rose also represents H.D.’s poetry and Imagism’s break from tradition. The rose *is* the poem. The sea rose, like her poem, is literally “making it new.” The “harsh” and “marred” flower resembles the cold, hard images of Imagism. There is no fluff, no extraneous substance in either the flower or the poem. Both are barren, but both are beautiful. The sea rose and the poem negate previously held conventions of what are valuable. Unlike Blake’s infected rose, the sea rose’s harshness and deformation make it more attractive and ultimately more valuable:

more precious
 than a wet rose
 single on a stem-
 you are caught in the drift.

The second stanza sets up the recurring concept of opposites, comparing two roses. The broken sea rose exists as more “precious” or desirable than the traditional rich, “wet rose.” It does not conform to the ideals of physical feminine beauty. The iconic rose falters in comparison to the battered sea rose.

Furthermore, the stanza also depicts the contradictory locations of the two roses. The lush rose remains “single on a stem,” emphasizing its delicacy, but also depicting an image of attachment-it is on a stem. This rose is a static image, and one can imagine it standing upright in full bloom in a garden. However, the sea rose is “caught in the drift.” It is detached and uprooted, depicting movement. The sea rose shifts from a fixed image in the first stanza to a moving image in the second. This poetic motion of the image

simultaneously parallels the actual shifting of the flower in the drift. The verb “caught” evokes the idea that the rose remains stuck in this vacillating position. Moreover, the specificity of the “drift” location illustrates the rose’s position on the shoreline. Unlike the traditional “wet rose” that grows inland, the sea rose resides on the threshold between sea and land, continuously drifting from one to the other. Moreover, the flower remains “caught” between the two opposing geographic forces, illustrating a forced liminality. The third stanza, or snapshot of the sea flower, furthers the flower’s identification with the liminal landscape:

Stunted, with small leaf,
 you are flung on the sand,
 you are lifted
 in the crisp sand
 that drives in the wind.

The flower’s juxtaposed location resembles the land of boundaries H.D. found herself in during the writing of *Sea Garden*. She, like the flower, remained “stuck” in the confines of Victorian societal pressures of female beauty and similarly “caught” in the bounds of Imagism. The repetitious “you” also implicitly signifies the “I” of H.D. She also struggled with her overwhelming attraction to both men and women. This liminal position of the sea rose represents her struggle between homosexuality and heterosexuality. She remained “stuck” in the middle, shifting with the tide.

More importantly, her bisexual tendencies had to be hidden, and H.D. feared that she would one day be “caught.” Pound did not approve of H.D.’s relationship with Gregg, and generally did not like Gregg as a person. Friedman mentions that he made

snide remarks to H.D. about their relationship, and even asserted that they “should have been burned as witches.” This comment Pound made to H.D. regarding her relationship with Frances Gregg repeatedly surfaces in the prose: “Hermione, you and she should have been burned as witches” (172). In *Asphodel*, H.D. illustrates her anxiety over her sexuality and compares this fear and her relationship to flowers:

They had trapped her, a girl who was a boy and they would always do that. They would always trap them, bash their heads like broken flowers from their stalks, break them for seeing things, having “visions” seeing things like she did and like Fayne Rabb. (9)

This description resembles the broken sea roses, highlighting the flower’s representation of H.D.

The repeated “you are” stresses the flower’s identification with not only the action against it, but also the landscape in general. The placement and capitalization of the adjective “Stunted” emphasizes the infertility of the flower and its thwarted growth. It remains “flung on the sand.” The powerful verb “flung” demonstrates the violent nature of the environment. One would assume that it is the sea or the wind that hurls the flower onto the sand, but these verbs never denote an actor. The speaker remains unknown, as does this mysterious attacking force. This passiveness highlights the defenselessness of the rose. The frail plant seems to be bombarded on all sides. The flower, however, survives the violence; the next line describes it as “lifted.” This verb “lifted” contradicts the brutality of “flung,” illustrating yet another example of the dualistic patterns that appear in the poem. The sea rose literally rises above the landscape and figuratively over the “wet rose” of tradition. In the last stanza, H.D. presents the reader with a question:

Can the spice-rose
 Drip such acrid fragrance
 Hardened in a leaf? (*CP* 5)

The stanza invites the reader to compare the scent of the “spice-rose” to the bitter fragrance of the sea rose. The poem ends with juxtaposition and uncertainty. Could the sea rose (or a reversal of traditional beauty, femininity, and poetry) survive? The speaker, and H.D., would answer yes.

The second flower poem in the volume, “Sea Lily,” furthers the image of the broken and abused blossom. Like “Sea Rose” the poem addresses the lily at the beginning, but ironically calls it a “Reed.” A reed signifies a generic botanical term for a variety of plants, but more specifically reeds grow on the edge of water. H.D. seems to purposely associate the two plants in order to call attention more to the liminal location rather than the actual flower. The lily is “slashed and torn,” “shattered,” and the sand “cuts” its petal while the wind “slash[es]” the bark (*CP* 14). However, like the sea rose, the speaker describes the mangled flower as “doubly rich,” demonstrating its beauty. As the title displays, the poem embodies landscape of both land and sea. Like the sea rose this flower similarly undergoes violence until the end where it is “lifted up” and exalted: “Yet though the whole wind / slash at your bark, / you are lifted up” (*CP* 14). The lily survives the torture of the inimical environment. However, the last two lines declare that although the flower perseveres, the wind “hiss / to cover you with froth.” This final stanza compares the wind to the sea: “Yet though the whole wind / slash at your bark...it hiss / to cover you with froth.” This merging of sea and air provides yet another example of the obfuscation of boundaries. The poem emphasizes the destructive nature of the

environment surrounding the sea lily. It seethes to overcome the shore and crush the flower with its suffocating foam. *Paint It Today* portrays the sea's powerful force with similar violent discourse and imagery:

The tide was thrusting against the glass blades. There was a little hiss, and each new wavelet seemed to gain impetus from some unknown power or some unapparent stream or undercurrent of force beneath the water. The tide had turned, was well toward the way to drowning out the little tide marks on the grass. The upper grass was half under water. (75)

The sea with its destructive quality serves as a metaphor for masculinity. Her Gart constantly associates George with the sea in HERmione; his hair, eyes, and body portray "sea-weed" and "odd sea-colour" (65). The overwhelming ocean portrays the suppression of the female poetic voice. The flower represents H.D., and so the sea lily illustrates the female poet surviving the male dominated canon. Like the flower, H.D. and other women writers were struggling to find their place among male writers such as Pound, Yeats, and Williams. H.D. felt the masculine canon threatened to overthrow her poetic position. Modernism was "unconsciously gendered masculine" (McCabe 66). H.D., along with Stein, Lowell and other women writers were battling against a phallogentric tradition of literature. In order for these modernist poets to "make it new," they had to break the present stifling of female creativity. H.D. continues to remain in a position separate from these men and masculinity, but at the same time on the edge. She, like the lily, resides on the perpetual shoreline, or threshold. Beaten and shattered, she survives, but remains left with the impending danger of the sea's tide, or the suffocation of a masculine milieu. But, she must remain in this position in order to face her struggle. Hermione displays a similar

attitude: “She knew she was not drowned. Where others would drown-lost, suffocated in this element-she knew that she lived” (63).

Lilies are mentioned again in *Sea Garden* in the poem “The Shrine,” subtitled (“She watches over the sea”). In this poem the speaker assures the flowers:

You are not forgot,
 O plunder of lilies,
 Honey is not more sweet
 Than the salt stretch of your beach.

H.D. again stresses the placement of the lilies on the shoreline to exemplify their superior position. The speaker pleads with them, “O but stay tender, enchanted / where wave-lengths cut you / apart from all the rest-“(CP 8). The battle with the waves marks the flowers’ individuality and ultimately their beauty. Like H.D., they remain different from “all the rest.”

Lilies also signify heterosexual eroticism. The sensuous lyrics of the Bible’s Song of Solomon incorporate lilies in the sexual dialogue of the two young lovers. This similar association of eroticism and lilies surfaces in H.D.’s *Asphodel*. However, the lilies do not represent heterosexual love, but rather the homosexual eroticism between Fayne and Hermione. Fayne remains connected to lilies throughout the novel. The narrator mentions that “Fayne seemed to rise somewhere in the dark street, to rise a white star, a white folded lily. Her dress wound about her stern small figure like lily leaves, a lily-bud still budded” (87). Hermione also expresses her love towards Fayne with the specific flowers: “White lilies. I would find you white lilies” (11). The narrator further links Fayne to lilies with another visual description: “Fayne seemed to rise somewhere in the dark street, to

rise a white star, a white folded lily Her dress wound about her stern small figure like lily leaves, a lily-bud still budded” (87). The floral description of Fayne and the overt sexual connotations emphasize H.D.’s tendency to express her emotions through botanical allusions. She uses the lily, which not only represents conventional femininity but also heterosexual erotics, to illustrate her homosexual love. This serves as another example of H.D.’s experimental application of traditions.

The third flower in the sea garden, and another representation of H.D.’s identity, is “Sea Poppies.” The first stanza depicts “fruit on the sand” rather than on soil. The seascape imagery immediately appears, illustrating the importance of this borderline position. Like the previous flower poems, the speaker addresses the sea poppies, but not until the third stanza:

your stalk has caught root
among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and spilt conch-shells

Like the sea rose, the aquatic poppy remains “caught” on the shoreline and “flung by the sea.” In addition, through the harsh environment the flower exhibits a precious disposition: “Beautiful, wide-spread.” Like “Sea Rose,” the poem ends with a familiar question: “what meadow yields / so fragrant a leaf / as your bright leaf?” The repeated contrast between inland flowers of the “meadow” and the shoreline flowers “among wet pebbles” stresses the importance of wildness in beauty.

Poppies also may allude to the Great War. The particular flower came to symbolize the War and remains an emblem of remembrance. The sea poppies placement at the threshold between sea and land parallels the war poppies location on the battle front. Both sets of poppies survive in the harshest conditions, and H.D. believes this unique perseverance makes them beautiful. During the time of her writing, Aldington was a soldier in the War. The inclusion of the specific poppy flower at the time in history strongly suggests the influence the War had on her writing and her specific identity.

The poem “Sea Violet” continues the representation of H.D.’s complex identity through floral terminology and imagery. Interestingly enough, the color violet exists as a blurring of two primary colors, blue and red. This specific color and flower consistently surfaces throughout H.D.’s oeuvre and emphasizes liminality. The poem “Sea Violet” continues this threshold motif and the reversal of traditionally beauty. The first stanza introduces the physical qualities of the flower as a “white violet...scented on its stalk,” and “sea-violet / fragile as agate.” The word “agate” can be separated into two words, illustrating the noun “a gate,” which continues the depiction of thresholds in the poem. The sea violet “lies fronting all the wind / among the torn shells / on the sand-bank.” The image depicts the solitary flower on the edge or bank of the ocean confronting the wind. The “torn shells” represent the violence of the natural elements that surround the flower on the shore. The speaker continues to construct contrasts between traditional beauty and terrible beauty in the second stanza:

The greater blue violets
flutter on the hill,
but who would change for these

who would change for these
 one root of the white sort?

The traditional blue violets inhabit the land on the hill, positioned as visually superior to the “white” sea violet lying on the beach. The sea violet in a supine position furthers this contradiction between the flowers. Moreover, these blue violets “flutter,” illustrating their delicate movements in direct comparison to the sea violet’s confrontation with the wind. The speaker then speculates who would prefer “one root of the white sort” to the “greater” blue violets. This contemplation reveals the tendency to dispute the beauty of the wild sea violet by comparison with traditional inland violets. In the third stanza, the speaker directly addresses the flower:

Violet
 your grasp is frail
 on the edge of the sand-hill,
 but you catch the light-
 frost, a star edges with its fire.

This stanza again portrays the flower’s weakness in the battle against the wind; its “grasp is frail.” The speaker also mentions the flower’s location “on the edge,” emphasizing the borderline location in the poem. Like the earlier flower poems, the violet also experiences exaltation at the end. Through all the torturous surroundings, the violet catches the light, ending the poem with the image of hope. Furthermore, the whiteness of the violet represents the underlying lesbian erotics and the desire for the female other in the poem, paralleling “Sea Lily” (Connor 121). Throughout the prose, the women of Hermione’s desire portray images of whiteness.

“Sea Iris” is the fifth and final flower poem that appears in *Sea Garden*. “Sea Iris” begins like the other poems with its introduction of the specific flower. However, the speaker immediately addresses the flower as a “Weed, moss-weed, / root tangled in sand.” This association of the iris with an undesirable plant furthers the reversal of commonplace beliefs of beauty. A weed exists as an undesirable, troublesome, and valueless plant that grows wildly in the environment. As the last flower poem, H.D. compares the iris to the weed to further stress the significance of her refusal of traditional beauty and Victorian femininity. She refuses to portray her flowers in the traditional sense. In this same way, her poetry rejects previously held literary conventions. Furthermore, the “brittle” and “broken” flower prints “a shadow / like a thin twig.” The shadow also emphasizes this liminal space and identity of the flower. The shadow exists as a limbo-like form of a figure, projecting a weak image of the flower. However, the last stanza of the poem places the sea iris in a superior position: “Band of iris-flowers / above the waves” (CP 37).

The speaker continues the paradoxical language with the description of the flower as “Fortunate one.” The flower remains the more favorable specimen. The dualities continue with the flower’s fragrance as “scented and stinging...sweet and salt.” The flower maintains a dualistic quality, symbolizing H.D.’s bisexuality and also her expatriatism. In *Tribute to Freud*, she explains: “There were two’s and two’s and two’s in my life” (46). She also confesses: “there were two countries, American and England as it happened, separated by wide gap in consciousness and a very wide stretch of the sea” (47). The “sweet and salt” of the sea iris parallels the two opposing sexualities and nationalities H.D. found herself to maintain. The position of the flower on the shoreline

corresponds to the “wide stretch of the sea” that separates the two countries. The crystallized, hard, cold floral poems do not represent impersonal entities, but the exact opposite. These flowers depict H.D.

H.D.’s Gardens

Within the *Sea Garden* two other gardens exist: the “Garden” and “Sheltered Garden.” These two poems provide a stifling landscape, which symbolizes H.D.’s struggle for individuality within the limitations of Imagism, the male milieu of Modernism, Victorian society, and traditional sexuality. The inland flowers that reside in the two gardens represent the conventions that stand in opposition to her complex identity. Opposite from the wild, dissonant sea flowers, H.D. also found herself struggling not just between two opposing forces, but desiring to be in this liminal state. The flowers in the two garden poems do not shift; they remain static and fixed. H.D. rejects this permanency.

The poem “Garden,” exists as two parts, both significantly different from each other. The first part begins with the speaker directly addressing a flower: “You are clear / O rose.” This echoes the beginnings of the floral poems, but the stanza further describes this particular rose as “cut in rock, / hard as the descent of hail” (*CP* 24). This rigid description breaks the traditional image of the flower as a sensuous, soft plant. The rose, furthermore, does not reside in a garden (or shoreline) at all, but rather chiseled in stone. This flower’s stability reverses the shifting seascape imagery of the sea flowers. The rose becomes the rock; thus, the poem blurs the boundaries between what is usually considered soft and hard. The chiseled rose, however, represents the sculpted poetry of Imagism. H.D. describes her early Imagist lyrics in a similar way. In a 1955 letter to

Norman Holmes Pearson she writes, “I feel the early poems were written to be seen, painted or chizzled, rather than to be dramatized” (qtd. in “H.D.-Who Is She?”). The “hard” and “clear” rose, furthermore, parallels the Amy Lowell’s description of the Imagist poetry in the 1915 anthology: “hard, clear, and concentrated” (Lowell vii). The familiar meshing of fluids and solids also is complicated in this first stanza. The flower portrays hardness similar to hail. Hail therefore exists as a solid form of water and it is visually clear. Hail is an image of juxtapositions-the fluidity of water is captured in a frozen form. The comparison of the usual soft flower to the hard, frozen water furthers the juxtaposition of opposites and dissolves traditional boundaries. The poem, like the rose and like hail, inhabits junctions of opposites. However, in this “garden” nothing grows, but rather everything stays fixed and rigid. The third stanza depicts the extreme hardness of the rose:

If I could break you
 I could break a tree.
 If I could stir
 I could break a tree-
 I could break you.

If the rose is her Imagist poetry, the conditional assertions exemplify her dualistic desire to break femininity and the Imagist code. But, in order to “break” the rose, she must possess a kind of superhuman strength: “I could break a tree.” The speaker also asserts, “If I could stir.” The line emphasizes the fixed position. This torpidity surfaces again in the next section of the poem. Interestingly enough, Pound referred to her as his “dryad,”

which in Greek mythology is a tree nymph. With this in mind, one can read these lines as her desire to simultaneously tear herself away from Pound's wing and her Imagist role.

In *HERmione*, the young woman thinks: "Trees no matter how elusive, in the end, walled one in. Trees were suffocation (7-8). Hermione's idea towards trees represents H.D.'s feelings toward her literary identity as crafted by Pound. He was instrumental in her success as a poet, but his development of the Imagist principles confined her to the movement. Hermione confesses: "Names are in people, people are in names. Trees are in people. People are in trees" (5). The correlation between trees and names suggests not only her nickname "dryad," but also her writing signature 'H.D.' Pound gave her those initials that legendary day at the British tea room, and she hid behind them her whole career. The initials allowed her to remain ambiguous, sexually and poetically. Friedman mentions that early readers wondered: "H.D., who is he?" Moreover, naming became significant for H.D. Her prose characters' names suggest a "break" from this hiding. In the first paragraph of *HERmione*, the main character asserts: "I am Her...Her, Her, Her,...I am Her, Her, Her, Her" (3). This repetition stresses the notion that H.D., is in fact Hermione. The character later confesses that she "was stronger than the "upright little tree" (68). These declarations from the poetry and the prose suggest H.D.' desire to break away from her role as Imagist, and also as Pound's muse.

The second section of this poem furthers the idea of suffocating compression. The part stood separate from the first half for several years, and appeared as "Heat" in 1914.

One can almost feel the stifling heat of the stanzas:

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,

rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
 through this thick air-
 fruit cannot fall into heat
 that presses up and blunts
 the points of pears
 and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat-
 plough through it,
 turning it on either side
 of your path

The hardness of the rose in the first section of the poem contradicts this soggy heat. The stagnant heat forces the fruit not to “drop” or fully ripen. This parallels H.D.’s stunted creativity within the bounds of Imagism. The Imagist doctrine is the heat. The wind that hurls and swirls the sea flowers remains the only means to suppress the strangling nature of this heat. This omnipresent wind recalls the necessary wildness and inimical environment the floral images need to be valuable. The inland fruit, smothered by the heat, stunts the growth. The phallic language used to describe the heat is unavoidable. The heat “presses up and blunts” the pears and grapes. The paradoxical relationship between masculine and feminine once again appears. The metaphors of confinement and suffocation reflect H.D.’s fears about her concealed homosexuality (or bisexuality).

This stifling heat in the “Garden” parallels the “hot” forest scene with Hermione and George in *HER*: “Heat seeped up, swept down, swirled about them with the green branches that was torrid tropic water. Green torrid tropic water where no snow fell...” (70). George chases her through the forest and Hermione can only think of the hot weather: “He wanted trees because it was hot, he wanted her because it was hot. It was hot” (43). Like the poem, the heat in the novel exemplifies the suffocating demands of heterosexuality. The intimate and erotic rendezvous in the forest leaves Hermione overwhelmed and smothered. This depiction exemplifies H.D.’s feelings of the oppression of heterosexuality.

The poem “Sheltered Garden” reverses the image of wildness and vulnerability. The title illustrates this opposition by suggesting the flowers are safely contained and guarded within a particular space: a sheltered garden. Furthermore, the title, “Sheltered Garden,” stands as the antithesis of the volume’s title, *Sea Garden*. The wildness of the sea flowers contradicts the domesticated enclosure of the inland garden. However, like the second half of “Garden,” this hothouse represents suffocation more than protection. The speaker asserts in the first stanza: “I have had enough. / I gasp for breath.” H.D.’s placing of periods after such expressions emphasize the strong feelings of desperation, causing the reader to pause after each declaration. The second stanza illustrates the unavoidable presence of an edge or threshold:

Every way ends, every road,
 every foot-path leads at last
 to the hill-crest-
 then you retrace your steps,

or find the same slope on the other side,
precipitate. (*CP* 19)

Every path leads to a cliff, or boundary. The speaker explains that even if one were to turn around, the same edge would appear and just as sharp. The speaker despises these limitations and again repeats: “I have had enough- / border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies, / herbs, sweet-cress.” These flowers exist inside the “sheltered” garden, and the speaker disapproves of them and their placement. Instead, the speaker longs for “some sharp swish of a branch,” or some act of violence against the living plants. Instead:

there is no scent of resin
in this place,
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,
aromatic, astringent-
only border on border of scented pinks.

Both the “weed” from “Sea Iris” and the “acrid fragrance” of the “Sea Rose” have no place in this inland garden. Here “only border on border of scented pinks” remain. This repetition of the color pink emphasizes the conventional beauty of the flowers that reside in the “Sheltered Garden.” The sea roses are never described as pink or even red; thus, they never represent the convention.

The secure garden also contains fruit, doubling the plant-like imagery in the poem. The speaker asks:

Have you seen fruit
under cover
that wanted light-

pears wadded in cloth,
 protected from the frost,
 melons, almost ripe,
 smothered in straw? (*CP* 20)

The poem depicts the fruit struggling for escape from the shelter. The image of the pear resembles that of an infant lying in a blanket, suggesting an innocence of these living entities. The straw also “smothered” the melons. Like the delicate flowers, the fruit remain protected in the garden from the potentially harmful environment. However, H.D. argues that fierce environment of clashing natural forces, makes the beauty. The speaker proposes, “Why not let the pears cling / to the empty branch?” and then declares, “All your coaxing will only make / a bitter fruit-.” The fruit needs to experience harsh reality rather than such petting and coddling in order to cultivate. The speaker advises the unknown “you” to “let them cling, ripen themselves, / test their own worth” (*CP* 20). If allowed to do this, the pears will become “nipped, shrivelled by the frost, / to fall,” but more importantly, they will fall “fair / with a russet coat.” The word “fair” serves as an interesting adjective to describe the drop of the fruit without any assistance. It signifies another reversal of traditional ideas. The pears experience injustice due to the comfort and protection placed upon them. The pears that become “shirvelled” and “nipped” are fair. The unknown subject, or “you,” that the speaker directs blame onto in the poem further depicts the image of opposing sides. The speaker proclaims that “this beauty, / beauty without strength, / chokes out life.” The traditional beauty of the pears, melons, and “scented pinks” does not satisfy the speaker. Their beauty exists as effortless and comfortable, unlike the tortured splendor of the sea flowers. The safe, enclosed garden

allows the plants to survive without any struggle. With this in mind, the speaker desires the fruit and inland flowers to experience a collision with the environment that would break this traditional image of beauty. The speaker provides an intense description of these desired violent acts:

I want wind to break,
 scatter these pink-stalks,
 snap off their spiced heads,
 fling them about with dead leaves-
 spread the paths with twigs,
 limbs broken off,
 trail great pine branches,
 hurled from some far wood
 right across the melon-patch,
 break pear and quince-
 leave half trees, torn, twisted

The speaker then asserts that the act should show that “the fight was valiant.” What makes the plants beautiful is their courageous behavior shown against the harsh environment. The struggle in the face of adversary is what gives the flowers value.

In the last stanza of the “Sheltered Garden,” the speaker asserts “O to blot out this garden / to forget, to find a new beauty / in some terrible / wind-tortured place.” This “wind-tortured place” recalls the shoreline of the sea flower poems “Sea Rose,” “Sea Lily,” “Sea Iris,” “Sea Poppies,” and “Sea Violet.” The protected, “sheltered” garden that resides safely away from the shore does not compare to the vulnerable open area of the

seacoast. She prefers these battered, wind-blown flowers because they represent her and her struggle to adapt to the ever-changing literary environment. Similarly, in *Paint It Today*, Midget exclaims, “Ah, the garden, if you could but see it after the rain!” (76). Midget highlights H.D.’s message in “Sheltered Garden.” The flowers would be beautiful only after they encounter the force of rain. Midget’s thoughts on flowers and value surface again and help further exemplify H.D.’s feelings on traditional beauty: “Midget came, in her early twenties, to hate the spring with its overly effusive glamour, its cherries sprung over night into full, deep-wadded bloom, to perish over night in a forced blight, a heat blight you might have thought, but that the young, almost mature leaves did their utmost to hide the ragged, sodden balls of withered blossoms” (77). Spring to H.D. and to Midget represents Victorian society’s view on femininity and homosexuality.

The pears also symbolize the female reproductive organs with their uterine shape. The smothering of the pears signifies the repression of female sexuality. This sexuality, of course, does not suggest heterosexuality but more her homosexual tendencies. H.D. proposes that the fruit should remain on its own, left to survive without any aid. This suggests her belief that women should be left to decide their own sexuality themselves.

H.D.’s “Sheltered Garden” also recalls the enclosed garden of Song of Solomon. Throughout the erotic dialogue of the poems, the young man describes the maiden as an “enclosed garden” that remains “locked,” and he comments on her physical attributes as though they were various forms of vegetation. The botanical imagery and verdant references in the poem allude to the fertility of the couple’s romantic relationship, but it also further exemplifies the motif of female sexuality correlating with the garden. This biblical closed-off or protected garden serves as a metaphor for the young female’s

innocence and chastity in the lyrical poems of the Bible. It also mirrors the inland garden of H.D.'s poem. Both gardens demonstrate traditional female sexuality as domestic and cultivated, but H.D.'s speaker rejects this innocence.

In *HERmione*, H.D.'s representative character fears being enclosed like the flowers. She thinks: "I will be caught finally, I will be broken. Not broken, walled in, incarcerated" (215). H.D. portrays herself as the wild, free sea flowers who reside outside the barriers of the walled-in garden. She exists removed from traditional beauty and conventional (hetero)sexuality. But this liberated position remains in jeopardy: She "will be caught finally." This refers to her unwillingness to openly expose her homosexual side. If it were revealed, H.D. feels as if it would be stopped, and she would be pressured to conform to the "scented pinks" of heterosexuality.

In the poem "Mid-day" the speaker confesses that she is "anguished-defeated." The reasons for this despair and frustration are left unknown, but the speaker compares herself to seed pods because of these emotions: "I am scattered in its whirl. / I am scattered like / the hot shriveled seeds." (CP 10) The poem fluctuates back and forth between the speaker's emotions and the natural landscape, "establishing the linguistic link between object and emotion" ("Penelope's Web 48). The numerous dashes after lines further illustrate the connection between the speaker's thoughts and the "spilt leaf." Like the "Sea Rose," the seeds denote passivity. The verbs "beats," "crackles," "shakes" and "scattered," emphasize the suffering the seeds and the speaker undergoes. She further explains that these "shrivelled seeds are spilt on the path" and compares them to the distant poplar:

yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
 and the blackened stalks of mint,
 the poplar is bright on the hill,
 the poplar spreads out,
 deep-rooted among trees (*CP* 10).

The multiplicity of the strewn seeds is in contrast to the solitary stable poplar. This flower is bright and fertile, spreading out across the hill and in the trees, and “deep-rooted.” The speaker emphasizes the poplar’s sturdiness with its placement “among trees.” Like the trees, it literally looks down on the “blackened stalks” and withering seeds. The seeds and the poplar serve as binary opposites. The poem ends with the speaker’s surrender to the poplar:

O poplar, you are great
 among the hill-stones,
 while I perish on the path
 among the crevices of the rocks. (*CP* 10)

Unlike the sea flowers poems, “Mid-day” does not end with the reversal of beauty; the shriveled seeds do not “lift” up at the end. The poem ends with defeat.

Although it does not appear in *Sea Garden*, “Oread” was published in the 1915 Imagist anthology, so therefore it was written within the same years of the first volume. It remains one of H.D.’s most famous and often anthologized poems and worth examining in light of *Sea Garden* and the autobiographical prose. Pound himself professed it was the perfect example of an Imagist poem; it is direct with “no excessive use of adjectives, no

metaphors that won't permit examination," and without "slither." However, the poem illustrates more than just the perfect form of Imagist poetry or Pound's remarks:

Whirl up, sea-
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

Like much of H.D.'s poetry, the specific title of the poem introduces the dominant image. This poem's title depicts the speaker, an oread. The oread, a Greek mountain nymph, desires that the ocean to merge with the land and overtake the nymphs. However, the poem does not simply concern itself with the two different geographic bodies; it is not about the land and the sea, but rather what the title states: the oread. "Oread" expresses a complex set of positions or identifications. The poem recalls a particular passage in *Paint It Today* where Midget and Julia share an intimate and highly eroticized scene on the marsh edge. During this moment the narrator makes an observation that remarkably mirrors the poem "Oread": "The sea grass and the marsh grass seemed to blend. Unless you straightened yourself and became alert and squinted carefully you could scarcely have stated off hand where the marsh ended and the sea began" (74).

Like most of the poems in *Sea Garden*, "Oread" blurs the boundaries between sea and land. The sea has "pointed" and "great" pines, and it leaves "pools of fir" (CP 55). This language confuses and prevents the distinction of polarity. As many critics have

already asserted, the poem does not use any similes to show the comparisons. The sea is not “like” the pines; it *is* the pines.

The poem illustrates an image of the sea and land converging, with the sea as the active pursuer and the land as the passive recipient. Furthermore, the verbs evoke violence: “whirl,” “splash,” “hurl,” and “cover.” Every line except one begins with a powerful verb, stressing the action of the waves and mimicking the motion of the ocean. The verb “cover” evokes feelings of smothering and submersion, recalling the suffocation of “Sheltered Garden” and the heat of “Garden.” The pointed pines display phallic images intruding on the female nymph figures. The emphasis on the connection of images, sexuality, and gender surface in the poem.

The intense verbs suggest the overflow of energy and the overwhelming position of the sea. The pronouns “you” and “us” further highlight the opposing sides of land and sea. The oread resides on the rocks, so is part of the land. As Friedman explains “she understandably perceives her fluid opposite in her own terms: waves are pointed pines that whirl up, crash, and make pools of fir. This nonrational mode of thought gives motion, fury, and a watery stillness to the land; conversely, it gives stature and stability to the sea” (Friedman 56-59). This fusion of opposites further blurs the boundaries and highlights the position of the oread in the middle. The nymph exists as neither land nor sea, and therefore neither masculine nor feminine. A fusion of both extremes, the oread displays the androgynous identity of the female speaker. The speaker, thus, represents H.D. and the union of opposites coexisting within her. She remains a personal metaphor for the poet H.D. Norman Holmes Pearson asserts that she “used Greek myth to find her own identity...she writes the most intensely personal poems using Greek myth as a

metaphor.” Juxtaposition illustrates a unified complex. The meshing of two opposites remains a significant conception in her works at this time Her position as a bisexual “encouraged a poetics that often became overflowing, even excessive in its blurring of one thing with another” (McCabe 77). The image of the fusion of waves and trees signifies the oread’s acceptance of her opposite. Hermione similarly experiences the junction of these two opposites, and she also takes the role of a nymph.

Throughout the novel *HERmione*, George refers to Hermione as his “dryad. The dryad, or tree nymph, serves as an absent yet ever-present figure with the “pools” of “fir.” H.D. therefore exists as a figure herself in the poem, symbolically embracing her “twin self,” or possibly accepting Pound in a way. Hermione constantly refers to George as an embodiment of the sea: “George gone tawny, hair the color of vermillion seaweed, wash of vermillion over grey rocks, the sea-green eyes that became sea-grey, that she saw as wide and far and full of odd sea-colour” (65). Hermione also resembles the oread with a vision of tree and waves uniting: “Her Gart looked up into liriodendron branches and flat tree leaf became, to her, lily pad on green pool. She was drowned now. She could no longer struggle”(4). The helplessness of Hermione parallels the oread’s embrace of the sea’s “pointed pines.” Both denote the speaker in a liminal position, and her surrender to the overwhelming force.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Forty years after the beginnings of Imagist poetry, H.D.'s childhood friend (and fellow Modernist) William Carlos Williams recalled specific instances in which the young female poet exemplified a peculiar fascination with the terrible forces of nature. He explains that after a storm in 1906, "without thought or action she went to meet the waves, walked right into them. I suppose she could swim, I don't know, but in she went and the first wave knocked her flat, the second rolled her into the undertow....They dragged her out unconscious, resuscitated her...." (qtd. in *The Pound Era* 175). Her desire to face the inimical environment and especially the forceful waves mirrors her sea flowers's struggle on the shoreline. She, like her aquatic flowers, places herself in the middle of the two opposing sides of land and sea. Although she experiences unconsciousness and has to be "resuscitated," she survives. To her, this survival is beauty. Not surprisingly, Williams confesses that her strange confrontations with nature "didn't improve her beauty or my opinion of her-but I had to admire her if that's what she wanted" (qtd. in *The Pound Era* 175). The two men in her early life both characterized her in naturalistic ways; Kenner explains, "Williams associated her with storms, as Pound with trees" (175).

This early association of H.D. and the natural environment parallels the flowers of her poetry and prose, but unlike Williams, she portrays the flowers' confrontations with nature as beautiful and unique. In a letter to Marianne Moore in 1921, H.D. explains her

feelings of exile: “I can’t write unless I am an outcast.” H.D.’s flowers are also outcasts. Her flowers are unlike traditional floral symbols and contradict the lush floral personifications of women in Victorian society. She uses these floral vehicles to express her personal feelings of expatriatism in Europe and her exile within the Modernist canon, ideal femininity, and categorical sexuality. The botanical references and anecdotes in her autobiographical prose help to decipher the floral profusion in her early poetry.

In *Asphodel*, George tells Hermione that she is “too modern” and “not modern enough” at the same time. She then wonders: “What does he think he means by that” (62). But, H.D. did exist as a paradoxical junction of extremes. Like her flowers, she resided on a perpetual threshold, a borderline, constantly inhabiting both opposing sides. Like Hermione in *Asphodel*, the “wind had ruffled her petal” and left her restless with modern society. Pound declares in his “A Few Don’ts” on Imagism that “it is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works” (4). H.D. did produce a vast amount of work in her lifetime, but her floral image remains one of the key characteristics not only of her work, but also of her identity.

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