Writing Back to the Margins: H.D.'s Prose and the Making of an Outcast

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In 1921, the same year H.D. began drafting *Paint It Today*, her first novelistic work of prose, she confided to her contemporary Marianne Moore, "I am beginning to feel as though the world approved of me—and I can't write unless I am an outcast. I have tried everything. I have been respectable and I have been not respectable. And now I am mediocre" (17 January 1921).¹ H.D.'s statement reveals a great deal about the personal, associative links she forged between creativity and marginalization, hinting that social or critical approval induced a self-imposed creative slump.² Because of her position as a middle-class, white woman at the forefront of high literary modernism, H.D.'s claim to exile should be considered carefully. Caren Kaplan's study of the modernist "aesthetic of exile" examines ways in which expatriate writers like H.D., Pound, Eliot, and Stein constructed ostracism as a generative myth, a mode of modernist production.³ H.D. contributes to this myth by exploring her expatriatism and bisexuality in prose, re-enforcing her particular sense of otherness. By emphasizing aspects of her identity that edged her "outside" America and the heterosexual norm, H.D. draws on the accepted dialogue connecting high modernism with the voluntary social and transnational "exile" as artist.

I suggest H.D. used her "autobiographical" novels to write herself back to the margins and out of a self-perceived artistic mediocrity fueled by mainstream critical successes, including the admiration of English and American poets and magazine

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¹ Marianne Moore papers, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, PA.
² H.D., born Hilda Doolittle, preferred to publish works under the abbreviation of her given name. Although Ezra Pound encouraged this *nom de plume*, it was one of H.D.'s earliest attempts to set herself apart from the mainstream by creating a distinct, artistic persona.
This reading diverges from contemporary critical understandings of H.D., notably from critic Susan Stanford Friedman, who focuses on H.D.'s gender, bisexuality, and expatriatism as markers of marginality. As Friedman rightly points out, H.D.'s works have spent decades in literary limbo—HER was published for the first time in 1981, more than fifty years after its completion—indicating how readily the academy forgot one of modernist poetry's first and finest voices. H.D. met with critical acclaim in London's literary circles for her work under the auspices of Imagism, a literary movement established in 1912, which "eliminated grammatical connective tissue in poetry, forcing the narrative and thematic elements of the poem to be carried through the image."5 However, the movement could not survive without the dynamic energy of its co-founder, Ezra Pound, who became more interested in the experimental writings of modernists working in Paris. Waning international interest in Imagism, H.D.'s reluctance to publish personal works about her sexuality, and her "minor" status as a female writer all contributed to H.D.'s gradual disappearance from critical attention.

Yet, long before her critical departure and recovery, H.D. welcomed the identity of the outcast. She settled in London, distancing herself from America and, in her own words, the "terrible difficulties and discouragements" it presented a female, bisexual writer who wished to operate outside the social and heterosexual norm.6 As an expatriate, H.D.'s complex relationship with America is complicated by her focus on the influential power of landscape in HER (1926). HER's main character, Hermione, feels

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alienated *within* her American landscape, which challenges understandings of H.D. as an outcast abroad and refigures H.D. as an "exile" in her own home. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that H.D.'s modes of creative production were inextricably linked to the modernist idea of the outcast, which she attempted to manufacture for herself in prose by examining her relationship to America, her sexual identity, and her self as a writer. This reconsideration of H.D. provides a fresh approach to reading her Imagist poetry, often analyzed out of the context of her prose *oeuvre*, and establishes an overlooked connection between H.D.'s prose and poetry, which explore the shared themes of enclosure, relationship to place, and objectification.

I.

H.D. develops themes of containment in her Imagist poetry that return in her "autobiographical" prose of the 1920s, explicitly connecting the American landscape to her early, creative suffocation. H.D.'s comments to Marianne Moore demonstrate her self-awareness of the tensions in both needing and shunning home. Although H.D. gained critical respect, her letters indicate she required ostracism in order to participate in the creative practice of modernism. Exploring her "failed" youth and unstable relationships with Pound, Gregg, Bryher, and Aldington, H.D. penned a string of autobiographical *romans à clef*: *Paint it Today*, *Asphodel*, and *HER*.\(^7\) Despite discouragement from both Aldington and her correspondent John Cournos, H.D.

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\(^7\) H.D. was connected to a distinct circle of modernists. She was engaged to Ezra Pound for a brief, tumultuous time, had relationships with Frances Josepha Gregg and life-long companion Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), and was married to English poet Richard Aldington.
experimented with narrative throughout the twenties, defending her transition into prose writing as "a means to an end":

I want to clear up an old tangle. Well, I do not put my personal self into my poems. But my personal self has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality. And in order to clear the ground, I have tried to write things down—in order to think straight, I have endeavoured to write straight (9 July [1920-21]).

H.D. identifies her novels as a way to return to the work of her "real artist personality," presumably her self-as-poet. Prose functions on a level separate from that of poetry, as a kind of utilitarian catharsis rather than an aesthetic endeavor. H.D.'s conviction in the practical purposes served by her prose, a bridge between her "personal self" and her poetic "artist personality," forges a link with her belief that creative production required "exile" status. H.D. began her foray into "autobiographical" novels the same year she wrote to Moore expressing a fear of regressing into literary mediocrity. Bereft of her "outcast" feeling, H.D. began to plumb the creative frustrations of her youth, revisiting moments of intellectual failure and sexual awakening and transforming them into prose. H.D. used these moments to manufacture a sense of exile from her home in Pennsylvania and to assert her sexual identity as outside of the heterosexual norm.

Much critical attention has been given to the political and economic relationship between expatriatism and creative production in the early twentieth century. However, H.D.'s life necessitates the extension of this discourse beyond the political and into the social-sexual. Kaplan notes how the practice of high modernist art privileged "detachment" from the writer's nation as "the precondition of creativity…legitimating

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8 Friedman, who quotes H.D.'s letter to Cournos in Penelope's Web, is unsure of the exact date. For a discussion of dating this letter, see Susan Stanford Friedman, Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 373n1.
points of view and constituting a point of entry into a professional domain." Living abroad became the only way for an artist to achieve an "outsider" perspective of her country, a perspective valued for its perceived "disconnection" from traditional modes of production, and one that would supposedly enhance experimental creativity. While Kaplan's argument addresses a predominantly male sphere of authority, H.D. similarly eschewed America and its suffocating, "primeval" landscape for the distant shores of England (HER 66). H.D.'s chosen role of "outcast" worked, therefore, on two distinct, co-operative levels: that of the female, expatriate writer who accepted and joined the legitimating process of national "detachment" to produce creative work and that of the female, bisexual writer who chose to further legitimate her claim to high modernism's "outcast" privilege by asserting a marginal sexuality.

Although H.D. fits Kaplan's model of the modernist author in many respects, she deviates from Kaplan's general assertion about the relationship between expatriates and place. In Kaplan's view, expatriate writers insist upon leaving home, using the resulting "detachment" from place to enter the creative "professional domain" of high modernism, yet their imagination conjures home in their creative work, "resolv[ing] the worst terrors of dislocation and anomie." However, it is this very sense of "dislocation" that H.D., in her own words, needed to participate in the creative practices of modernism. Unlike the model Kaplan offers of the expatriate writer, H.D. avoids re-establishing a nostalgic

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9 Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 36.
12 Kaplan's mention of "anomie," the breakdown of social norms and values, especially for "uprooted" people, is especially interesting in this context, given that Kaplan examines the ways in which expatriate writers create their own sense of "anomie" for aesthetic gain and later seek to overcome the effects of their creation by re-establishing a nostalgic connection with home.
connection to America in *HER*, using the landscape of her home as a place to express and reinforce feelings of dissociation and marginality. H.D.’s conviction in the connection between the "outcast" and the writer explains the amount of attention she gives the landscape throughout *HER*. To this end, the forests of Pennsylvania are symbolically and inescapably repressive, while the seaside, with its open spaces, is representative of an unreachable freedom, a tension neither resolved by the end of the novel nor colored by a nostalgic afterglow.

*Enclosure in HER*

In the opening pages of *HER*, H.D. explores the conflicting desires of the adolescent Hermione, who longs for both escape from and acceptance within the emotional and physical landscape of her family's Pennsylvania home. America's eastern coast is Hermione's primary alternative to the undesirable location of central Pennsylvania, where the "green on green" of "trees grown closer" suffocates and stifles, leading Hermione toward "certifiable insanity" (*HER* 6-7). Not only does the forest have the power to overwhelm and enclose Hermione, but the foliage also takes on the characteristics of a pond: "…flat tree leaf, became, to her, lily pad on green pool. She was drowned now" (*HER* 4). H.D.’s innovative of use of imagery doubles the oppressiveness of Hermione's landscape, inextricably linking place to Hermione's mode of seeing and understanding her world.

Faced with such a repressive landscape, Hermione craves the saving power of "the inner lining of an Atlantic breaker" on the shores of New Jersey, the only place that can "rout" Pennsylvania's maddening shroud of forests (*HER* 7). The openness of New
Jersey's seascape appeals to Hermione, and she develops a definition of freedom through location: "she wanted sand under bare heels...a dog that would race ahead of her while breakers drew up, drew back; she wanted a dog, nothing else, no one else. She wanted to be alone on some stretch of sand with dunes rising at the back" (HER 6). Hermione's focus on solitude, reflected by the open seascape, hints at H.D.'s project of constructing outcastness as a mode of creativity and a productive form of emotional instability while she wrote the novel abroad in 1926.13 H.D. develops the idea of the outcast in Hermione's escape fantasy of the seashore, distinguishing between Hermione's estrangement from the suppressive forces of home and her desire for a solitary freedom that can only occur at the New Jersey shore. For Hermione, self-induced separation from home becomes a necessary mode of mental and emotional self-preservation.

In contrast to the boundless, oceanic landscape of her family's cottage on the New Jersey cape, with its "stretch of sand…dunes" and "stretches of fibrous marsh grass," Hermione's descriptions of Pennsylvania are claustrophobic reminders of her failure in the sciences and mathematics, an inadequacy that shapes her understanding of home (HER 6). A returning theme of Hermione's interior dialogue, intellectual failure, is inseparable from her surroundings: "Pennsylvania whirled round her in cones of concentric colour, cones….concentric…conic sections was the final test she failed in" (HER 5). Notably, the science of Pennsylvania's "conic sections" is the same science of her brother and father, which had "failed her" and made Hermione "good for nothing"

13 Although the actual dates of HER's writing are uncertain, Friedman's research suggests H.D. began writing the novel in 1926 and possibly continued through 1927, picking the piece back up in 1930. Friedman provides a chronological chart for dating H.D.'s writing on pp. 360-366 of Penelope's Web.
(HER 6). Hermione therefore roots her understandings of home and family in her experience of creative and intellectual suppression.

Much as Gertrude Stein examines the ways in which character traits are passed genetically from generation to generation in *The Making of Americans*, H.D. traces the relationship of the Garts to the landscape, and Hermione's conflicted inheritance of her parents' experiences settling in Pennsylvania. In her article about H.D.'s connection to the American landscape, Annette Debo suggests, "Hermione's feelings for place are genetically directed; an attachment to place is embedded in a literal, biological way."\(^{14}\) Although H.D. establishes a connection between Hermione's conflicted relationship to her home and the experiences of her parents, H.D. carefully distinguishes between Hermione's heritage, her literal "roots," and her specific genetic makeup, avoiding the biological language Debo cites. Because of the early experiences of her settler parents, Hermione inherits an internal tension between abandoning an oppressive landscape for creative freedom and loyalty to a static sense of place:

In Pennsylvania, Carl Gart had found a sort of peace and a submergence of the thing that drove him, that had driven his people to New England and then West to trek back East. In Eugenia Gart, the fibres were rooted and mossed over and not to be disrupted (HER 9).

By treating Eugenia as a natural feature, an extension of the Gart's chosen surroundings, H.D. intensifies a familial identification with the land through metaphor. Although Carl Gart now finds "peace in the green shadows" of Pennsylvania "after the inland prairies…and Atlantic waters," Hermione feels pulled toward the "forever-tumbled breakers" of her father's past home, certain the ocean offers escape from the stifling

closeness of the forests (HER 9). Because Hermione inherits both her father's settler spirit and her mother's deep roots, she is certain that "If she went away, her spirit would break; if she stayed, she would be suffocated," language that recalls Hermione's sense of intellectual and emotional claustrophobia.

While the immediate conflict within HER appears to be one of locality, linking the oppressive forces of Hermione's home with her family's connection to specific American places, Hermione's resistance to leaving home helps develop the novel's international themes. Despite her pressing need to avoid "suffocation," Hermione exhibits a surprisingly aloof attitude toward escaping to Europe, or abandoning the national for the international: "She did not sigh as people did in those days, 'Well, I'll some day get to Europe.' Europe existed as static little pictures…Pictures were conclusive things and Her Gart was not conclusive. Europe would be like that" (HER 7). Although Europe would provide Hermione with an escape route, she balks at the seemingly contained nature of the cultural and geographical entity, "Europe." H.D.'s comparison of Europe to "conclusive" landscape paintings of "Venice by moonlight," bounded by canvas and frame, echoes Hermione's fears of enclosure and helps explain her fixation on the open sea (HER 7).

Hermione's desire to escape to the New Jersey shore with its "Atlantic breaker[s]" implicitly bridges the American and European shorelines, despite Hermione's initial distaste for the bourgeois desire to travel. Hermione's resistance to Europe conflicts with her certainty that "Another country called her, the only thing that would heal, that would blot out [Pennsylvania]" (HER 7). By identifying the "other country" as New Jersey, Hermione superimposes the international upon the national and embraces the familial
impulse pushing her toward the Atlantic. Yet, as assured by her hereditary make-up, the very impulse that drives Hermione to "get away," holds her to "the essential" nature of her place as an American, urging her to "merge…with the thing she so loathed" \( (HER\ 7) \). H.D. further develops \( HER\)'s international themes through natural imagery, overlaying a European landscape upon the Pennsylvania countryside that entraps Hemione:

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\text{She did not know that Pennsylvania bears traces of a superimposed county-England of a luscious beauty-loving Saxony. She could not know that the birdfoot violets she so especially cherished had far Alpine kinsfolk, that the hepaticas she called "American" grew in still more luminous cluster at the base of the Grammont, along the ridges of the Jura…(\(HER\ 9)\).}
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Much in the way Hermione identifies New Jersey as "another country," the narrator hints at the widened geographical scope of her landscape, as deeply rooted in "European" as "American" flora and fauna. Hermione's remapping anticipates an eventual break with America and bears resemblance to H.D.'s personal aesthetic of exile, which both required and resisted America as place and nation. H.D. doubles the role of the America constructed in \( HER\) through Hermione's remapping, emphasizing both the foreignness of Hermione's home and her alienation from it.

In \( HER\), H.D. overwhelmingly concentrates on the landscape of her Pennsylvania home as a suffocating and overpowering force, a force that has the ability to mirror Hermione's sense of alienation in her own home. Hermione's character demonstrates a concern with alienation, not only \textit{from} America, but also \textit{in} America. This reading of H.D. further transforms Kaplan's idea of the modernist exile as a voluntary expatriate whose self-imposed distance from her nation legitimated a claim to modernist art. While H.D. chose to expatriate herself from America and settle in London, the connections between physical landscape and estrangement from home indicate H.D.'s manufactured
identity as an exile contains a specifically "American" layer. By emphasizing the alienating power of Hermione's home, H.D. tapped into yet another kind of exile, and, in a sense, doubled her claims to modernist legitimacy. An outcast in her own home, H.D. utilized the American landscape as an alternative artistic space in which to express suffocation and enclosure, strengthening the link between creative production and exile status.

Enclosure in Sea Garden

When read in light of H.D.'s autobiographical prose, "Sheltered Garden" (1916) shares the themes of enclosure and claustrophobia H.D. would later develop more fully in HER. H.D.'s prose expands upon her poetry's preoccupation with landscape, illustrating that the associative links H.D. created between alienation and landscape in HER were present in her early poetry, albeit in different forms. Although H.D. does not ground the natural imagery of "Sheltered Garden" in a specific place, Annette Debo's recent archival research reveals H.D. drew from particular American landscapes while writing Sea Garden. Debo's analysis of a letter H.D. wrote to Norman Homes Pearson, her close editor and friend, complicates critics' claims that H.D.'s landscapes "exist in an imaginary Greek world."¹⁵ H.D.'s poetic landscape is often described as classical because of her attention to mythological figures and places; however, she identifies Pennsylvania as a "source" of her "poetic images" in her letter to Pearson.¹⁶ While Debo's research links H.D.'s poetic landscapes to her home, I develop the implicit connection between landscape and alienation in H.D.'s early poetry by reading HER with "Sheltered Garden,"

¹⁵ Debo, "H.D.'s American Landscape," 19.
¹⁶ Ibid., 3.
demonstrating that H.D.'s project of constructing herself as an "exile" at home drew on the themes of her Imagist poetry.

"Sheltered Garden" accurately reflects the thematic concerns of border anxiety expressed in HER, mimicking the novel's superimposed knowledge of a world beyond the immediate landscape. Much like the opening of HER, "Sheltered Garden" begins at a moment of emotional crisis perpetuated, in part, by landscape:

   I have had enough.
   I gasp for breath.

   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 (Collected Poems 19).

The speaker's claustrophobic response to the circular paths and the repetitive scenery recalls Hermione's antipathy to "trees grown closer, grown near and near" (HER 7). Never making any progress beyond the bounds of the garden, the speaker in "Sheltered Garden" encounters "the same slope" at the top of each "hill-crest," just as Hermione feels penned in by the "green on green" of Pennsylvania as it "whirled round her in cones of concentric colour" (HER 5).

   As both the speaker of "Sheltered Garden" and Hermione confront their bounded landscapes, H.D. uses the repetition of words and images to demonstrate the ways in which the garden or the forest impose their stifling, finite areas. In the garden, a catalogue of flowers, "border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax lilies, / herbs, sweet-cress," unravels with the speaker's growing sense of frustration into "border on border of scented pinks" (Collected Poems 19). The confining omnipresence of the garden's border takes
precedence over any aesthetic appeal the garden may once have offered, while the recurring "pinks" of the cultivated flora now serve as a reminder of the speaker's enclosure. Similarly, for Hermione, Pennsylvania's forests transform from a "network of oak and deflowered dogwood" to the "green on green" of a landscape closing in (HER 3). Not only do the colors of Hermione's forest bleed into one another, but they also overlap and take on the characteristics of a pool that threatens to drown her (HER 4). H.D. recasts Hermione's claustrophobic perception of landscape to metaphorically address an overpowering emotional frustration, retaining the visual overlapping of color to reinforce Hermione's conflicted ties to the land.

In a move that recalls H.D.'s superimposition of a European landscape upon Hermione's America, the speaker in "Sheltered Garden" reminisces of wilder, untamed surroundings. Syntactically, this undomesticated environs elbows out the fragile pinks and confining borders of the sheltered garden:

O for some sharp swish of a branch—
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 (Collected Poems 19).

By using a spondee to separate the speaker's preferred environment from the hated perfume of the garden's flowers, H.D. brings the "scent of resin," "taste of bark" and "coarse weeds" of the speaker's imagination to the foreground of the poem. The very language with which H.D. evokes this alternate landscape, the violence of the phrase "sharp swish of a branch," for example, suggests the force with which the speaker rebels against the confines of the sheltered garden and anticipates the re-vision of the space later in the poem.
Unlike Hermione, the speaker in "Sheltered Garden" ultimately rejects her landscape, imaginatively re-ordering the space and eliminating the garden's sense of confinement. While Hermione suffers under the irrepressible weight of her environment, allowing her associations between the forest and the imagined "green pools" to dictate her emotional "drowning," H.D.'s poetic speaker emphasizes the forcefulness with which she wishes to destroy an oppressive landscape:

I want the 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 but showing the fight was valiant (Collected Poems 20).

The speaker desires destruction and imagines the regression of order into a chaos resembling a more natural state, but she never takes initiative to change the garden or to leave the space altogether. Despite the violent, internal struggle of the speaker with her landscape, H.D. purposely evades resolution in the body of the poem, emphasizing the containment of the speaker and her lack of agency. In these ways, H.D. reaffirms the speaker's position as a helpless captive in an unwanted landscape and explores the tension between needing the undesirable in order to envision, or invent, an alternative environment.

Curiously, H.D. allows the poetic speaker in "Enclosed Garden" to re-envision but not destroy the environs of the poem, granting the speaker an imaginative forcefulness that never drives Hermione. While the emotional impulse of Hermione's struggle should
not be devalued, I find Hermione's lack of imaginative agency, her mental inability to reorder the repressive landscape of home, to be a compelling confirmation of H.D.'s use of prose. Even if, as in "Sheltered Garden," H.D. wished to highlight the theme of enclosure by rescinding the agency of her speaker, she granted her poetic speaker the ability to envision true change. Although Hermione does hope for her family's New Jersey retreat on the seashore, she conjures no violent, internal struggle for achieving happiness. Hermione resists the thought of international movement and escape, arguably adding to her own feelings of "certifiability" by fusing natural images of suffocation and drowning.

H.D. fixated on Hermione's conflicted relationship with the landscape of her home, emphasizing Hermione's inability to imaginatively force out the unwanted like the speaker in "Sheltered Garden." By focusing on Hermione's lack of imaginative agency, H.D. could validate the identity she manufactured for herself as an exile. Hermione's creative stifling lends itself well to H.D.'s association of "outcastness" with creative production as expressed to Marianne Moore. Not only do Hermione's feelings of alienation while living in America re-define how modernists can claim exile, but her character's dissociation with the American landscape also re-enforces H.D.'s own decision to migrate to London in 1912. This doubled mode of production allows H.D. both to legitimate her claims to the modernist mode of production and to re-create the outcast frame of being she declared necessary for writing.
II.

As much as *HER* is a project that helped H.D. re-enforce her feelings of estrangement from her Pennsylvania home, manufacturing an identity as a modernist in exile, the novel also establishes sexual identity as a marker of social marginalization. By expressing homosexual desire in the early twentieth century, H.D. laid claim to an identity that pushed her away from the heterosexual norm. H.D. was extremely conscious of this "outsider" effect—she feared both the criticism and litigation faced by Radclyffe Hall and other lesbian authors who published in the 1920s and was reluctant to submit *HER* for publication.\(^{17}\) In H.D.'s words to Marianne Moore about the connection between writing and outcast status, I see the conflation of H.D.'s sexual identity, expressed as a form of otherness in *HER*, with her "voluntary" expatriatism.\(^{18}\) In other words, while H.D.'s bisexuality functions on a separate level from her expatriatism, the two identifiers act together to fortify the sense of otherness she needed to produce creatively, legitimating her authority as an avant garde writer. Just as H.D. used prose to sort out the "emotional tangle" of her "detachment" from home, she examines her burgeoning sexual attraction to women in *HER*, dramatizing the rift this attraction created between her fiancé, Ezra Pound, to further emphasize her separation from the sexual-social norm of heterosexual desire.

Paradoxically, H.D. emphasizes qualities Hermione shares with another outsider, Fayne Rabb, a character based on H.D.'s first female love, Frances Josepha Gregg. Hermione senses in Fayne a "sisterly" quality and builds an emotional fantasy in which

\(^{17}\) Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 103.

\(^{18}\) Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 28.
the two lovers shore one another against the social expectations of marriage and heterosexual love. H.D.'s project to construct a sense of otherness weakens as Hermione seeks to transform Fayne into her ideal fellow outcast. While I do not wish to detract from the radical social implications of H.D.'s decisions to explore Hermione's sexuality, H.D.'s overall aesthetic concern with connecting her social position of "outcast" to creative production led, in part, to a focus on the sexual-social differences Hermione constructs for Fayne. Not only does Hermione's bisexuality help H.D. position herself further away from the heterosexual norm, but Hermione's need to invent Fayne's sexual difference also emphasizes the extent to which H.D. viewed sexuality as an aspect of her outcast identity.

During one of their first intimate interactions, Hermione categorizes Fayne as a fellow "prophetess," the only person who allows her to "see the transience in everything" (HER 145-146). Drawn to Fayne's ability to help her glimpse "projections of things beyond," Hermione revels in their new-found closeness: "Her Gart had found her new possession. You put things, people under, so to speak, the lenses of the eyes of Fayne Rabb and people, things come right in geometric contour" (HER 146-147). Not only does Hermione identify Fayne as her "possession," a state of (sexual) objectification H.D. ultimately challenges in HER, but she also associates Fayne with a specific mode of seeing or knowing the world. Hermione views this mode of seeing as an alternative to the scientific methods of her father, conflating language of scientific seeing, such as "things come right in geometric contour," with Fayne's prophetic abilities. Where Hermione once struggled with the knowledge of her "failure" to approach the world

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19 For a discussion of H.D.'s reclamation of female desire from the male tradition, see Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 100-135.
scientifically, to see "geometric contour," the presence of Fayne brings Hermione's world into focus.

Hermione wishes to distinguish Fayne as a fellow outcast, a kindred spirit out of place at home and in Philadelphia's social circles. However, Fayne's identity as a partner in Hermione's emotional fantasy collapses when Mrs. Rabb, a snobbish, urban socialite, provokes Hermione during a Philadelphia visit, "her nose in the air, all the time saying we, we, we are so insuperably above you" (HER 152). Hermione has trouble placing Fayne, her fellow outcast, as a product of luxury and social hierarchy, refusing to believe that Fayne will step foot in the home where Mrs. Rabb has made her so unwelcome. When Fayne finally emerges from upstairs, she is incongruous with the young woman that Hermione knew at Gart Grange: "Fayne does not go with Mrs. Rabb, not my Fayne. The voice that rasped, that cut, that bleated like a wild thing on a hillcrest was Fayne. Fayne was in the voice that rasped, that bleated" (HER 155). Although Fayne meets the social expectations of Mrs. Rabb, her voice and demeanor change drastically and seem affected. Hermione ultimately decides that "Mrs. Rabb negate[s] Fayne" because she needs to believe Fayne cannot belong to the world Hermione longs to escape (HER 160).

Hermione's cherished emotional fantasy culminates in genuine sexual attraction, mutual desire that begins as a kind of "sisterly" affection. By claiming Fayne as a fellow outcast, Hermione recognizes herself in her new friend:

I know her. Her. I am Her. She is Her. Knowing her, I know Her. She is some amplification of myself like amoeba giving birth, by breaking off, to amoeba. I am a sort of mother, a sort of sister to Her. "O sister my sister O fleet sweet swallow" (HER 158).

"Knowing" Fayne helps Hermione to know herself and to forge an identity that in turn fortifies Hermione's emotional fantasy of their shared "differences," a process of naming
that undermines H.D.'s project of constructing otherness. Hermione imagines that Fayne "amplifies" her own personality, participating in an enclosed circuit of personal regeneration. Thus Hermione's personal identification with Fayne is conflated with a creational and generative myth. Hermione is born of Fayne is born of Hermione—a symbolic, closed community through which Hermione can grow comfortable with lesbian desire as an integral part of a shared identity.

H.D. returns to images of Hermione's landscape to describe lesbian desire, re-casting natural imagery that once symbolized Hermione's creative repression and enclosure as the affirmation of Hermione's sexuality and her recognition of a kindred spirit. Because H.D. transforms the meaning of landscape in HER to capture Hermione's growing sexual awareness, she attempts to re-enforce her self-assertion of sexual otherness. Hermione's sexual attraction to Fayne culminates in a possible kiss, shrouded by H.D.'s stream-of-conscious narration. H.D. returns to the overlapping forest and sea imagery from earlier in the novel, transforming fused images of enclosure, the suffocating Pennsylvania forest and deadly pools of water, into a landscape of desire:

Her Gart saw rings and circles, the rings and circles that were the eyes of Fayne Rabb. Rings and circles made concentric curve toward a ceiling that was, as it were, the bottom of a deep pool. Her and Fayne Rabb were flung into a concentric intimacy, rings on rings that made a geometric circle toward a ceiling, that curved over them like ripples on a pond surface. Her and Fayne were flung, as it were, to the bottom of some strange element and looming up...there were rings on rings of circles as if they had fallen into a deep well and were looking up..."long since half kissed away" (HER 164).

No longer do the "concentric circles" close in upon Hermione, but they invite her to share a "concentric intimacy" with Fayne, an intimacy now connected both to desire and to Hermione's new epistemology. Hermione describes her visions of desire in the scientific
language of her father, transforming the language of "curves" and "rings" into an entirely new way of seeing and of understanding her sexuality. Underlying the "rings and circles" of their intimate glance is the "strange element" the new couple stumbles upon—homosexual desire—a force that engulfs them both "as if they had fallen into a deep well." H.D.'s decision to revisit the language that captured Hermione's feelings of intellectual failure and re-cast the imagery in terms of desire speaks to H.D.'s methods of creative production. Just as H.D. uses the autobiographical novels to manufacture a sense of exile—an estrangement from home—she also examines her self-assertion of otherness in terms of homosexual desire.

H.D. contrasts Hermione's experience with homosexual desire to the overwhelming and often suffocating affections of her male lover, George Lowndes, clef for the overbearing, eccentric Ezra Pound. As a repressive reminder of the heterosexual norm, Lowndes re-enforces H.D.'s dissociation with the social expectation of marriage and reveals H.D.'s frustration with the social capital marriage lends to women. H.D.'s choice of imagery connects George Lowndes to the shifting, suffocating landscape Hermione struggled to navigate at the beginning of the novel: "$'It's under water" she wanted to say; "$'it's under deep-sea water," she didn't say. Her eyes half-closing saw George gone tawny, leaf-colour, his hair is the colour of leaves drifting down, he had drifted down from trees" (HER 65). George takes on the same, inconstant and indeterminate qualities of the forest that enclosed Hermione, making it difficult for Her to "love Goerge Lowndes properly" (HER 65).

Hermione cannot reciprocate George's affection—his kisses "smudge" Hermione "out"—and she becomes more and more uncertain about marriage (HER 73). She wants
to clarify her vision of the "tricky, unreliable" Lowndes and plans to use Fayne's prophetic powers to determine her future: "For George Lowndes pirouetting like a harlequin must be got right. Hermione must (before discarding George Lowndes) get George right" (HER 73, 147). Hermione transfers her need for direction from Lowndes to Fayne, whose prophecies fascinate and clarify as neatly as "Carl Gart with his microscope" (HER 146-147). However, George has promised Hermione a way to break with her suffocating home life, and she is reluctant to "discard" the lifestyle he represents. Although Hermione refuses to align herself with the social norm that George represents, she is both hurt and stunned by Fayne's rejection and her sudden conscription of heterosexual desire, a betrayal made worse by Fayne's choice of partner—George. Fayne's infidelity not only reveals the wobbly scaffolding of their constructed "sisterhood," but also cuts Hermione loose from a myth that hindered the production of H.D.'s manufactured otherness. By choosing George, Fayne personally legitimates the social norm of heterosexual desire and leaves Hermione to negotiate the marginal space of bisexuality on her own (HER 218-219). The ending of HER, in which Hermione is alienated by her decision to make "no choice at all" between heterosexual and homosexual desire, ultimately re-positions H.D.'s claim to outcast status. H.D.'s attempts to re-enforce her feelings of otherness, temporarily undermined by Hermione's construction of Fayne as a fellow outcast, recover as Hermione's sexual identity bars her from conventional social modes of behavior.

III.

Thus far I have established the ways in which H.D. used her prose to manufacture the required and expected sense of "exile" appropriated by moderns as an aesthetic of production, re-affirming both her "detachment" from home and her sexual difference to assert her outcast status. These modes of manufacturing intersect primarily with the broad cultural fields of nationality and sexuality and only indirectly address actual creative production. Because H.D.'s ultimate goal is to write herself back to the margins, I also find it necessary to address the actual process of writing and inspiration as described in HER. Although Friedman argues that H.D. "[c]laim[s] subject status for the muse," her assertion overlooks the writer-muse relationship that develops between Fayne and Hermione. 21 Part of Friedman's claim is true—Hermione does reject her status as a sexual object, but she does not completely avoid appropriating the (male) objectification of women, specifically in writer-muse relationships. H.D. rejects the relationship of muse and writer only after it becomes clear the muse disrupts a writer's claim to outcast status by providing a sexual-social partnership that bridges the writer to society. However, Friedman preferences H.D.'s radical subversion of the "male loop of textual desire" and positions H.D. as a vocal proponent of a female-centered poetics. 22 Friedman's project, perhaps necessarily, overlooks the problem of Hermione's objectification of Fayne, in order to laud H.D.'s radical repositioning of the female writer in a primarily male profession. In Friedman's reading, H.D.'s reclamation of female desire and creativity is reactive rather than generative, a response to (male) modernism

21 Stanford Friedman, Penelope's Web, 106-107.
22 Ibid., 107.
and not a personal effort to create her own experimental modernism, an interpretation that rescues H.D. from the marginal status that H.D. claimed was necessary for creative production.

The muse complicates the modern writer's solitary mode of creative production by serving as a silent creative partner. For the writer to truly be an "outcast," the act of writing must come independently, without the aid of the traditional muse. This need explains the creative failings of Hermione and Fayne's relationship. Hermione not only constructs Fayne's identity as a fellow outcast but also elevates her to the status of a muse. In Shari Benstock's study of the female experience of modernism, she examines the language H.D. uses to describe Fayne and Hermione's kiss as an example of "patriarchal appropriation":

…the dialogue is dissembled in the exchange [between 'Her' and 'her'] precisely because each woman wants to make the other the object of desire. Both play Pygmalion, both play the male lover in search of an image of desire into which he will breathe life. Their lesbian eroticism is translated into radically heterosexual terms.23

Unlike Stanford Friedman, Benstock accurately notes how the relationship between Hermione and Fayne retains the (male) sexual objectification that destabilizes the construction of the writer as outcast. Hermione undergoes a similarly objectifying process in her relationship with George Lowndes, evident in Hermione's nickname from George, Her, the ultimate female "object." Both of these objectifications fail because, as Friedman rightly suggests, HER is also a project of claiming subject status, of writing alone.24

23 Benstock, Women of the Left Bank, 346.
24 Stanford Friedman, Penelope's Web, 106, 111.
Hermione first begins writing because of a feeling brought on by meeting Fayne and remembering her eyes, "two gambler's gems, star sapphires" (HER 75). Struck by the "saving" power of words affirmed by this image, Hermione overcomes her feelings of failure connected to mathematics:

Words may be my heritage and with words I will prove conic sections a falsity and the very stars that wheel and frame concentric pattern as mere very-stars, gems put there, a gift, a diadem, a crown, a chair… (HER 76).

Even before Hermione recognizes Fayne as a fellow prophetess, she uses the memory of Fayne's eyes to forge a vocation for herself as a writer. Through this newly identified "heritage," Hermione senses a way to deconstruct "conic sections" as a theory built on words, which are easily manipulated. Caught up in her attraction to Fayne, Hermione chooses to position Fayne as a traditional muse, a sexual and creative object. Hermione's social dependence upon the construction of Fayne as her fellow outcast undermines H.D.'s project of manufacturing otherness, just as Hermione's elevation of Fayne to the status of muse subverts the reclamation of female autonomy and the necessary solitude of the writer.

During Hermione's intimate moments with both George and Fayne, H.D. uses imagery of marbled statuary to describe the lovers' bodies, metaphorically transforming both Hermione and Fayne into objects. George Lowndes, who constantly reminds Hermione of her status as a sexual object, forces his affections on Hermione. Pinned beneath George, Hermione analyzes the "dehumanizing" effect of his kiss as if from a distance:

"[George's] kiss doesn't affect the back of my head. The back of marble head pressed down down down into moss, down down into moss that wasn't affected in the slightest by recurrent, rather charming really, kisses of this George" (HER 74).
Hermione mentally separates her body, heavy as marble under the weight of George, from George's kiss, furthering herself from the immediacy of the act. Despite the way Hermione recoils from George's sexual objectification of her body, she attempts to positively transform her own objectification of Fayne. When Hermione lays her "cold" hands on Fayne's eyes, they "...are healing. They have dynamic white power" (HER 180). Hermione's hands reassure Fayne, whose body is described as "white marble covered with blue serge," a perfect objet d'art in her sleep (HER 181). Hermione's description of Fayne enacts a kind of spell for preservation through bodily objectification, re-enforcing Hermione's fantasy of Fayne as "possession," fellow outcast, and creative inspiration.

Both of Hermione's love relationships that develop muse-writer connections crumble: Hermione cannot live under the creative suffocation of George Lowndes, nor can her relationship with Fayne sustain H.D.'s project of creating the writer as an outcast from social norms. By the end of the novel, Hermione, abandoned by Fayne for George, finally realizes the social and creative requirements of H.D.'s outcast construction. After a debilitating illness brought on by Fayne's betrayal, Hermione ventures out into the snow-covered landscape, noticing how "[h]er feet were pencils tracing a path through a forest" (HER 223). Only after fulfilling her need to manufacture a sense of outcastness and alienation does H.D. make a final commentary on the relationship between creative production and exile: the writer writes alone.
Pygmalion: Creative Production and Objectification

By reading H.D.'s Imagist poetry in light of her prose, it is easier to access poetic subjects that would otherwise remain in a closed conversation with H.D.'s body of poetic works. H.D. returns to many poetic images in her prose, suggesting that her prose continues a dialogue and expands on the associative thoughts she developed with particular images. In light of my discussion about H.D.'s modes of creative production, I return to one of H.D.'s most obvious poems about the relationship between an artist and an object of inspiration. "Pygmalion" (1913-1917) foreshadows the way in which Hermione imagines both Fayne and herself as statues and recalls Fayne's role in George Bernard Shaw's play of the same title. The poem's opening lines suggest that the barrier between artist and object is breaking down, as Pygmalion wonders: "Shall I let myself be caught / in my own light? / Shall I let myself be broken / in my own heat?" (Collected Poems 48). Much like Hermione conflates the description of herself and Fayne, "a marble self for a marble self, Her for Her, Her for Fayne," Pygmalion fuses images of both artist and creation (HER 177). The light from the fire illuminates Pygmalion, while the heat from his forges breaks against his own skin.

In part four of the poem, Pygmalion's creations come to life, mocking their creator and completely disrupting the artist-object relationship. Pygmalion watches as "each of the gods, perfect / cries out from a perfect throat: / you are useless, / no marble can bind me, / no stone suggest" (Complete Poems 50). The statues defy Pygmalion to consider them as objects; art fails to approximate or "suggest" the living subject. On the surface level of the poem, H.D. renounces the normative, inferior position of the object in a power dynamic. However, in Benstock's words, this poem also speaks to the project of
"patriarchal appropriation" Hermione attempts in *HER*. Just as Hermione uses the (male) language of sexual objectification in her relationship with Fayne, H.D. takes on the male persona of Pygmalion in her poem. Both appropriations end in the object's crushing rejection: Fayne abandons Hermione for George, and Pygmalion's statues mock his literal attempts to objectify them. The respective failures of these appropriations push H.D. to solve the problem of objectification she problematically attempted to reclaim.

H.D. explores the debilitating power of sexual objectification through the love triangle of George, Hermione, and Fayne and rejects Hermione's "object" status by giving her a voice. Similarly, the statues speak at the end of "Pygmalion," an anthropomorphic representation of H.D.'s subversion of the traditional subject-object relationship.

H.D. epitomizes these tensions between (female) linguistic appropriation of male sexual-social power and the renunciation of sexual objectification in the title of her book, *HER*—both the name of a character, subject of the narrative, and the definitive female object. H.D.'s preoccupation with the subject-object relationship, both in language and in art, indicates that *HER*, a project that re-enforced her own generative myth of the outcast, also provided a platform for a larger political statement. While H.D. claimed to need outcastness in order to write, she was neither willing to be alienated by sexual objectification nor to be positioned as a muse, a passive participant in the male creative processes of Pound or Aldington. H.D. did, however, choose to give the (male) modernist modes of production—expatriation and exile—legitimacy, and she set out to create an outcast identity in prose. In the end, H.D.'s project, which rejected sexual objectification and encouraged active (female) participation in the creative process,

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subverted one aspect of the male tradition of authorship of which she sought to become a part.

Oread: Creative Production and Place

As Kaplan's study on the "aesthetic of exile" and expatriatism suggests, understandings of and relationships to place are an integral aspect of the specific mode of modernist creative production. In HER, H.D. examines the effects of the American landscape on Hermione, thematically reenacting the processes of alienation and "exile" H.D. claimed were necessary for her own ability to participate in the practice of modernism. Because HER takes place in America, and Hermione feels entrapped by a very specific, Pennsylvanian landscape, I believe HER challenges the critical view of H.D. as an expatriate modernist bound up in the "imaginary Greek world" of her Imagist poetry. While H.D. did spend the majority of her life abroad, her treatment of America in HER, coupled with Debo's research, repositions H.D. as an expatriate at home, alienated by her family and the heterosexual norms that constrained her sexual and creative identities. H.D. uses the American landscape as a medium through which she can explore the tensions of exile and sexual otherness, creating an alternative, artistic space as she establishes her own place in the generative myths of modernism.

While the relationship between place and creative production is perhaps more easily traced in H.D.'s prose, the similarities between HER and H.D.'s early poem "Oread" indicate that her poetry contained vestiges of the place-identity connection she later expanded upon in prose. For the speaker in "Oread," a wood nymph, place is

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26 Debo, "H.D.'s American Landscape," 19.
unavoidable and a defining aspect of her identity, even shaping the ways she describes a landscape drastically different from the one in which she lives. The poem captures the wood nymph's glimpse of the ocean and showcases the innovative, overlapping imagery of landscape H.D. used so frequently in prose:

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 (Collected Poems 55).

H.D. creates the effect of imagining the sea in terms of the forest, which in turn changes the speaker's perception of her forest, now imbued with imagery of the sea. This fluidity of movement between languages of the forest and of the ocean recalls the overlapping landscapes, at once both terrestrial and aquatic, with which Hermione identifies.

Tellingly, George, who ushers Hermione into the world of writing, nicknames her "dryad," and Hermione even calls herself "a tree planted by the river of water," a process of naming that defines Hermione in relation to place (HER 73). Although the landscape in HER mirrors both Hermione's intellectual stifling and sexual awakening, it also becomes a way for Hermione to define the terms of her new way of seeing once she meets Fayne. Overwhelmed by the "green on green" of Pennsylvania's forests, which have the quality of a "lily pad on green pool," Hermione uses Fayne to bring her world's "geometric contour[s]" into focus (HER 4, 7, 147).

H.D. created a distinctive prose style that infused her poetic images with the length and direction of a full narrative, re-examining place and transforming landscape
into a creative space rife with the emotional "tangle" that prompted her to first write her "autobiographical" novels. In H.D.'s description of Hermione's suffocating landscape, I see H.D.'s attempt to manufacture exile, further establishing distance between herself and America at a time when she most needed the distance to produce work. Yet, as an expatriate writing abroad, H.D. utilized a doubled mode of production. Hermione's sense of alienation while living in America indicates that H.D. imagined herself as an expatriate at home, which challenges Kaplan's expatriate "aesthetic of exile" and adds an additional layer of outcastness to H.D.'s expatriate identity. For H.D. place appears to be inextricable from identity and, in both her poetry and prose, the American landscape often mirrors this connection, demarcating the creative space of H.D.'s particular modernism. At the same time, H.D. uses landscape and place in HER to mark the homosexual awakening of Hermione, a desire that H.D. shared and that distinctly marginalized her from the heterosexual norm of the twenties. By re-visiting moments in which Hermione encounters feelings of ostracism, creative suffocation, and homosexual desire, H.D. is able to write herself back into the margins, re-enforcing the sense of exile and otherness she needed both to write and to legitimate her own modernist experimentations.
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