

‘Pushing on Through Transparencies’: H.D.’s Shores and the Creation of New Space

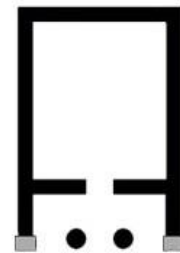
Elizabeth O’Connor

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antae

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‘Pushing on Through Transparencies’: H.D.’s Shores and the Creation of New Space

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Mountain nymphs, ravaged sea-flowers, talking trees, and Nordic wolfhounds: H.D.’s landscapes are dream-like, if not surreal, in their conception. In this essay I aim to examine the ways in which H.D. employs a shore motif to construct various “elsewheres” in her work, in order to create new spaces where alternative values and thoughts may be developed and expressed, and where the voiceless may be heard.

H.D.’s inclusion of the shore motif is at once an homage to the reality of the East-Coast landscapes she grew up with and a narrative of a paradisiacal elsewhere that is steeped in nostalgia, poetic metaphor, and the desire for escape or freedom. H.D.’s shore constructs a new space, an alternative to accepted borders and definitions; in the same way that a shore inhabits space that is and is not land, is and is not sea, H.D. is able to construct a self and voice which is neither male nor female, divine nor mortal, real nor unreal, of society and yet apart from it. This line of coast constructs an elsewhere where H.D. finds true scope to her expression; her shores are depopulated, her poetic voice is singular and often that of an outcast who is at once liberated and isolated by the rootless landscape. Whilst her elsewhere is immediately self-contained, it has resonances for how the human mind projects its desires and experiences onto the landscape, and explores environment as a crucial factor in the formation of the self.

Critics such as Annette Debo and Celena Kusch have rightly pointed out that H.D.’s shores are not merely daydreams, but are formed along explorations of national identity, naturalist exploration, and self-actualisation. Their work traces inextricable links between the writer’s search for place and the writer’s search for self, positing the view that H.D.’s lifelong search for self-knowledge (characterised outside of her poetry by an interest in psychoanalysis and dabbling in mysticism and the occult) is written into the landscapes she describes and invents. H.D. also allows the landscape itself to speak in poems like ‘Oread’ and ‘The Pool’, which feature speakers who hold dialogues with their natural surroundings and give a voice to mountains, trees, and water. Debo, whose work traces H.D.’s poetic landscapes back to the American landscapes of her youth, identifies the seashore itself in *Sea Garden* as New England imagery in lines such as ‘the splendour of your ragged coast’ in ‘The Shrine’, whilst the ‘gulls and sea-birds that cry discords’ in ‘The Wind Sleepers’ for her recall Casco Bay in southern Maine, near Portland.¹ Norman Holmes Pearson, a close friend of H.D. and a scholar of her work, has commented that the Greek landscapes and narratives often associated with H.D. are actually ‘often told me that her nature imagery [...] was never really Greek but came from her childhood reminiscences of Watch Hill and the coasts of Rhode Island and Maine, which she

¹ Annette Debo, ‘H.D.’s American Landscape: The Power and Permanence of Place’, *South Atlantic Review*, 69(3/4) (2004), 1-22 (p. 3).

used to visit with her friends as a child'.² It is clear that these shores hold a dualism between reality and poetic imagination, and that they are part of both a specific narrative of place as well as the dream-like visions of her poetry and prose.

For the purposes of this article, I will be reading her novel *HERmione*, her first collection of poetry *Sea Garden*, and arguably her most famous poem, the 1915 'Oread', for traces of shores and the construction of new spaces within them. This is by no means an exhaustive study of the shore in her work, but presents a compelling overview of its presence in her more well-known texts. Firstly, I will trace the presence of a New Jersey beach, Point Pleasant, in *HERmione*. The status of Point Pleasant as an aspirational elsewhere offers Hermione, the novel's heroine, an escape from the confines of her stifling home-life, and examines the ways in which a personal identity is moulded and influenced by the various environments surrounding them. Secondly, I will study the flower poems of *Sea Garden* in which H.D. reveals the influence of her home environment and personal struggles on her modernist depictions of wildflowers and coastal wilderness, before turning to the poems' wider significance as a geographical marker and representative of H.D.'s poetic vision. I will lastly examine 'Oread' to prefigure a discussion of the shore as a metaphor for gender division and the unification of man and nature beneath an ecopoetic guise.

I

This notion of "is and is not", which allows the shore to function as a new, anti-conventional space, is pertinent to H.D.'s self-actualisation as a writer, and this notion of existing between certainties in a state of inter-definition resounds through her work. In an early novel, the heavily autobiographical *HERmione*, H.D. describes her heroine Hermione Gart as such: 'she was not of the world, she was not in the world, unhappily she was not out of the world'.³ Her development, she writes, is 'forced along slippery lines of exact definition; marked supernorm, marked subnorm'.⁴ Her elsewhere is easily defined; it is named as Point Pleasant, a beach in New Jersey. a place away from the pressures placed on her to marry George Lowndes, a figure based on Ezra Pound who H.D. knew as a young woman, away from the 'too clear, too perfect' lawn and 'suffocating' house, away from not fitting in with her sisters and mother. Hermione recognises herself as 'an importunate over-grown, unincarnated entity that had no place here'.⁵

The ultimate goal in Hermione's struggle for self-actualisation is to reach the freedom of the shore:

she wanted to get to Point Pleasant... She wanted to climb through walls of no visible dimension. Tree walls were visible, were to be extended to know reach of universe. Trees, no matter how elusive, in the end, walled one in.⁶

² L.S. Dembo, 'Norman Holmes Pearson on H.D.: An Interview', *Contemporary Literature*, 10(4) (1969), 435-446 (p. 437).

³ H.D., *HERmione* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1981), p. 8.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 83, 10.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

The trees, forests and pastures surrounding Hermione's Pennsylvania home stifle her ability to breathe and live, but the coast offers escape; offers the "elsewhere" alternative to a dissatisfying and stunting reality. Hermione's struggle is a personal one, a coming-of-age crisis of identity. She asks, 'she was not Gart, she was not Hermione, she was not anymore Her Gart, what was she?'.⁷ After picking up a copy of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and realising her namesake, she falls into near-trance: 'I am out of this book [...] water lying filled with weeds and lily-pads... lilies of all kinds... became even more fluid, was being taken up and up, element [...] become vapour'.⁸ She admits a sense of identification with water but also longs for the clarity it supposedly brings, the 'transparencies' of the 'sea wall' that stood in contrast to the wild 'cones of concentric colour' and 'translucent [...] celluloid tree stuff' of the dense forests around her home.⁹

The value of Point Pleasant is not the actual landscape but H.D.'s inner conception of the place, this identification with water by her name and projection of the value of transparency versus the opaqueness of her present struggles. As in H.D.'s memoir *The Gift*, where a childhood friend first describes it to her, Point Pleasant is an aspirational dream-land. This friend had not been there either, and also accesses the beach through the realm of imaginative thought.

[H]e hadn't been to Point Pleasant, but that is what it was like, there was lots of sand and shells and you could walk for miles along the ocean and there was a place where you could buy balloons he thought, but he was sure we could get peanuts, he said.¹⁰

The reader never sees Hermione reach Point Pleasant in the novel, and is presented with it only as an aspirational place; the peace and freedom it offers is in its status as an imaginary elsewhere that exists in Hermione's daydreaming. She imagines herself there with a wolfhound, 'a dog that would race ahead of her while breakers drew up, drew back', and the reader is almost surprised to learn that she already has a dog, albeit one that doesn't measure up to her fantasy: 'Jock, breathing in her face, was an ungracious substitute'.¹¹ To Hermione, her Point Pleasant aspirations are not only meant to be read in the mind's eye, but also encompass simply a sense of "anywhere but here", anywhere and anything that is not associated with her home and her frustration at being a Gart.

Yet she knows that her actual home environment is not to blame, and that this landscape is as much a part of her identity as the elsewhere she craves: 'the two fused and blended, she was both moss-grown, imbedded and at the same time staring with her inner vision on forever-tumbled breakers. If she went away, her spirit would break; if she stayed, she would be suffocated'. Her true hope is that her escape, and her merging with the water, will ultimately bring a sense of belonging: 'she wanted to get away, yet to be merged eventually with the thing she so loathed'.¹²

⁷ *HERmione*, p. 4.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰ H.D., *The Gift*, ed. by Jane Augustine (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1969), p. 200.

¹¹ *HERmione*, pp. 6, 10.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 9, 7.

II

In contrast to the imaginative shore-space of *HERmione* which the reader never experiences, H.D.'s first collection of poetry, *Sea Garden*, explores the landscape of the shore in visceral and near-scientific detail. Not only do flowers and sand grains appear under the microscope of her poetic eye, but the poems conflate ugliness and beauty, God and mortal, human and plant, in order to construct the shore as a transition to an alternative world. This is a Modernist version of American transcendentalism that accepts nature as the symbol of the spirit but posits that nature may enact a space where accepted tropes, definitions and assumptions of both society and art may be tested. This shore is both familiar and alien, here and elsewhere—the sound of the sea, the harsh wind, the grating sand are all described in visceral detail, but flowers and other landscape markers are deconstructed into shapes, colours, and textures in order for a space between definitions, between the land and sea, to thrive.

The “flower poems” of *Sea Garden*, comprising ‘Sea Rose’, ‘Sea Poppies’, ‘Sea Lily’, ‘Sea Violets’ and ‘Sea Iris’, reinvent the classical flower trope by celebrating the harsh ugliness of wildflowers that inhabit the coast, and in doing so construct a poetic event and space in which alternative ideals of beauty and poetic value are applauded. The flowers are moulded by the wind, spray, sand, and cold: the lily is ‘slashed and torn / [...] shattered / in the wind’¹³, the poppy has ‘caught root / among wet pebbles’¹⁴, the violet ‘lies fronting all the wind’¹⁵, the rose is ‘caught in the drift’ and ‘flung on the sand’.¹⁶ Away from the doctrines and assumptions of human society, the landscape imposes itself on the fragile flowers and moulds them, but its wildness is also the source of their beauty and strength. H.D. argues, through her poems, that such resilience is more impressive than a shallow but pleasing aesthetic. The sea rose bears no relation to its atypically romantic domestic counterpart, it is ‘more precious / than a wet rose / single on a stem’.¹⁷ These flowers encompass every element of the coastal space despite their smallness and fragility; the scent of the ‘Sea Iris’ becomes the ‘wind in our nostrils’ as it drags ‘up colour from the sand’,¹⁸ and the ‘Sea Violet’¹⁹ is electric as it catches ‘the light - / frost, a star edges with its fire’.

Through this detailed appreciation of alternative beauty, H.D. begins to deconstruct and dismantle accepted beauty norms in her poetic vision, and create a new space where her own view of beauty, resilient and bold, can become newly accepted. Some of her flowers are painted surreally; her sea lily is a riddle, a plant that has petals yet is a ‘reed’, has ‘bark’, ‘myrtle bark’ that forms ‘scales’ as well as a ‘stem’, lives on coastal ‘sand’ yet ‘drift[s] upon temple steps’, and is destroyed by a tangible wind that can ‘hiss’ and ‘froth’.²⁰ The collection of *Sea Garden*, itself a newly-appropriated synonym for the shore, is a world entirely of H.D.’s making, an

¹³ H.D., ‘Sea Lily’, from *Collected Poems 1912-1944*, ed. by Louis L. Martz (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p. 14.

¹⁴ H.D., ‘Sea Poppies’, *Collected Poems*, p. 21.

¹⁵ H.D., ‘Sea Violet’, *Collected Poems*, p. 25.

¹⁶ H.D., ‘Sea Rose’, *Collected Poems*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ H.D., ‘Sea Iris’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁹ ‘Sea Violet’, p. 25.

²⁰ ‘Sea Lily’, p. 14.

“elsewhere” space, almost a subculture, in which outcast beings like the overlooked wildflowers may thrive.

H.D., in her novel *Paint It Today*, emphasises that landscape can shape identities as much as race, class, or gender. She writes that ‘language and tradition do not make a people, but the heat that presses on them, the cold that baffles them, the alternating lengths of night and day’.²¹ When H.D. interrogates the accepted beauty of domesticated flowers and the rejection of coastal flora, she interrogates societal values that are reinforced through the binaries of landscapes and natural objects that are accepted or rejected as valuable or beautiful. These poems place female beauty and delicacy against strength, resilience, and confidence, and ask what alternative values lie beneath the idyllic “landscapes” that have been pressed into us.

Annette Debo notes that H.D.’s flower poems describe wildflowers native to New England, or in the case of ‘Sea Lily’, a marine species indigenous to the same landscape. Debo reimagines H.D.’s vision of the shore in *Sea Garden* not simply as a poet looking for a metaphor in nature, but a kind of naturalist explorer, documenting her observations and discoveries in a single habitat with a scientific eye: ‘her “catalog” replicates the many variations of a species, much as a nature illustrator might create a book of northeastern flora or a nature writer might record her explorations’.²² Indeed, ‘Sea Gods’ lists myriad forms of violets, and her flower poems describe their subjects in an unusual kind of “zoomed-in” detail. Adalaide Morris and Charlotte Mandel both attribute her poetic technique to inherited scientific habits of method and precision from her father, a prominent astronomer, and her grandfather, an influential botanist.^{23,24} In *The Gift*, H.D. recalls watching her Grandfather place botanical specimens under a microscope; ‘everyone brought thing like that to out grandfather, because he had a microscope and studied things and drew pictures of branches of moss that you could not see with your eyes’.²⁵ Combined with a childhood appreciation for the exploration of the shore—her cousin, Francis Wolle, testifies to her training in the local flora and fauna in their summer play as children, where ‘[c]hiefly under Eric’s [H.D.’s brother, a scientist] guidance we got to know the birds, plants, and wild flowers’²⁶—H.D.’s engagement with the scientific minutiae of her world endowed her with an eye for what Annette Debo terms ‘botanical accuracy’, and a poetry that elevates the conventional flower trope to a new poetic space, where it is seen for both ecological and artistic design.²⁷

If the shore of *Sea Garden* becomes a place of self-exploration and actualisation for H.D., then this notion of a botanical and poetic eye is telling. It anticipates a later unpublished poem of H.D.’s, ‘Helios and Athene’, in which Athene knows the secrets of both sexes and can therefore fuse “female” spirituality with “male” science, and suggests that the dualism of her flower poems in *Sea Garden* is part of a larger effort to find a female voice in what we could call the

²¹ H.D., *Paint It Today* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992), p. 32.

²² Debo, ‘H.D.’s American Landscape’, p. 5.

²³ See Adelaide Morris, ‘Science and the Mythopoeic Mind: The Case of H.D.’ in *Chaos and Order*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 195-220, p. 199.

²⁴ See Charlotte Mandel, ‘Magical Lenses: Poet’s Vision Beyond the Naked Eye’, in *H.D. Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 301 – 318, p. 307.

²⁵ H.D., *The Gift*, p. 41.

²⁶ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 33.

²⁷ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2012), p. 56.

“male” voice of Imagism (being, as it were, dominated by male writers and the phallogentric writing of Ezra Pound), thus creating a space where a female poetic voice may not only exist but may be heard talking about female identity and sexuality.²⁸

H.D. clearly understands the awkwardness of being a female writer posited between Modernist womanhood and Victorian femininity. As Mrs Carter announces conditionally in H.D.'s novel *Bid Me to Live*, “I believe in women doing what they like. I believe in the modern woman”; but, as H.D. adds:

in 1913, the “modern woman” had no special place on the map, and to be “modern” in Mrs. Carter’s sense, after 1914, required some very specific handling. “I believe in intelligent women having experience” was then a very, very thin line to toe, a very, very frail wire to do a tight-rope act on.²⁹

The wildflowers of the shoreline are surely dotted along this very tightrope; H.D. makes a more overt gesture towards finding a new female occupancy in poetry in the *Sea Garden* poem ‘Sheltered Garden’. This poem promotes a renewal of the concept of beauty so that old forms, beauty ‘without strength’ that ‘chokes out life’ may be forgotten. The speaker has ‘had enough’ of the ‘border on border of scented pinks’ of the idyllic, manicured garden she feels trapped in, and yearns for its destruction into wilderness, the ‘terrible wind-tortured place’.³⁰ The poem parallels H.D.’s own rejection of Victorian concepts of femininity in favour of wildness and independence. In *Sea Garden* as a whole, H.D. uses the shore as an imaginative space for locating personal freedom, through a renewal of seeing in the flower poems, and the untameable wildness of the wind, sand, and waves that governs the book.

III

This sense of the necessity of the destruction of old definitions and the emergence of a new space re-emerges in H.D.’s most famous poem, ‘Oread’. Whereas in the previous work I have discussed the strived for “elsewhere” is a separate identity to the speaker, something that is imagined or strived for, ‘Oread’ observes speaker and environment unite as the land is subsumed by sea. Rather than finding occupancy in the space between objective definitions, H.D. here creates new space by fusing them together in a complex fluidity. As is it only a few lines long, it can be quoted here in its entirety:

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.³¹

²⁸ H.D., ‘Helios and Athene’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 326-327.

²⁹ H.D., *Bid Me to Live* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1960), p. 97.

³⁰ H.D., ‘Sheltered Garden’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 19-21.

³¹ H.D., ‘Oread’, *Collected Poems*, p. 55.

‘Oread’ exudes a kind of visceral power in its Vorticist dynamism and swirling sense of movement, but it also demonstrates the capacity of the shore image to allow for H.D.’s explorations into gender identity and self-actualisation.³²

The poem patterns itself over complex layers of identities; whilst the title of the poem prompts the reader into assuming the speaker is Oread, the mountain nymph, it is significant that the sea is conceptualised into pine trees that signify both land and the shape of the oncoming waves. The notion of the Dryad, a tree nymph, is ubiquitous in H.D., used often in her novels to describe the autobiographical heroines and Ezra Pound’s pet-name for her. Though never quite present, this pine Dryad gives the poem a second point of consciousness, one belonging both to the author and the speechless, rootless pines. If the Dryad enacts the voice of the author, then vocalisation of the mountain nymph becomes an entity both of the writer and separate to her, and the pine trees encompass a distant landscape feature, a poetic rendering of the waves, and an extension of the self-invading the land and taking control of the poem. The border between land and sea is fluid and interchangeable; the defining features of either are completely eliminated as the sea is becomes ‘green’, ‘great pines’ and ‘pools of fir’; H.D. presents us with the union of two opposing forces and well as their clash.

Through this layering of voice, a human consciousness is projected onto both land and sea, and furthermore creates a space in which trees and mountains are sentient beings, able to communicate with one another and the human reader. Susan Stanford Friedman writes that Oread is ‘phenomenological in emphasis’, a poem about ‘consciousness, not the world of objects external to consciousness’.³³ Crucially, the human consciousness of the poem is rooted in its natural surroundings; the “elsewhere” pined for by the speaker not only asks for sea to subsume the land, but for the human voice of the poem to be absorbed into the fluidity of land and sea. It is a construction of a new space that extols the fragility of human/natural separation, and is ecopoetic in its imagining of a place where man and nature are not just interrelated, but inseparable.

Dianne Chisholm reads the poem as a comment on the boundaries facing H.D. as woman in both the social and poetic spheres: “‘Oread’ is a symptom of women’s lack of authoritative position, of signification as women in the public, symbolic order, and ... a lifelong struggle to materialize the vital desire to forge a definition and find a sign—however esoteric—with which to signify herself”.³⁴ The blending of land and sea in ‘Oread’ mirrors the purpose of the *Sea Garden* collection to breakdown the separations between binary definitions. Helen Sword’s

³² ‘Oread’ is identified as a model Vorticist poem by Pound in 1914. Here, a vortex represents a point of both maximum energy and stasis that directs energy elsewhere and/or is surrounded by that energy (e.g. the centre of a whirlpool or the eye of a storm). Artistically, vorticism will reject “mimicry” in favour of the primary image; in ‘Oread’, this image is the green pine trees that form the shape of sea spray or a splash of water, and the voice of the speaker becomes a stasis around which the waves crash and merge with the land as well as a participant in that energy. See Ezra Pound, ‘Vortex. Pound.’, in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 97-99.

³³ Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Exile in the American Grain: H.D.’s Diaspora’, *Women’s Writing in Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 87-112, p. 99.

³⁴ Dianne Chisholm. ‘H.D.’s Auto/heterography’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 9.1 (1990), pp. 79-106, p. 87.

ironic questioning of gendered sea and shore in *Sea Garden* comes to mind again in the fluidity displayed in 'Oread': 'do we posit a fluid "female" sea and a rigid "male" land? A passive 'female' shore and an active "male" sea?'³⁵ In 'Oread', the clashing and merging of two seemingly binary elements reveals the nature of such definitive systems to be inherently non-existent, or in the very least arbitrary, and posits a new space that liberates separate definitions from their various confines into utopic union.

H.D. writes about the coastal landscape with an awareness of both its richness as a poetic metaphor and reality as an ecological space, with flora and fauna portrayed both as objects of beauty and scientific specimens. As I wrote in the introduction, H.D.'s landscapes have received little critical attention, but the potential for H.D. to be read as an eco-poet, or in the very least a nature writer interested in human agency within a natural space, is there. Annette Debo posits that H.D. is an 'environmental determinist', for her belief that environmental conditions, 'the sensory experience, the influence of seasons', becomes the governing influence in the construction of a person's identity, more so than social or cultural conditions.³⁶ She cites Cheryl Glotfelty's question of ecocritics—where, 'in addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category?'—and convincingly argues the ways in H.D.'s work reveals a deep-rooted influence of the Atlantic coast.³⁷

H.D.'s work, with its naturalistic studies of flora and fauna masking the social and personal struggles of the speaker, may be read alongside Angus Fletcher's conception of the 'environment poem'. Fletcher's definition of eco-poetry considers the work of any writer for whom 'reality-based' descriptions are 'determinative', grounding nature poetry in literal description but also expressing a connection to an 'an ecological surrounding'.³⁸ Such poetry writes neither 'about the surrounding world' nor presents it 'analytically', and 'does not merely suggest or indicate an environment as part of its thematic meaning, but actually gets the reader to enter into the poem as if it were the reader's environment of living'.³⁹ H.D.'s poems operate a philosophy of reciprocity with the shore landscape; the wildflowers comfort H.D., a rejection of conventional female beauty and virtue, with their hardiness and their perfect design for survival against the elements; the human spirit of 'Oread' finds union and belonging by giving its voice over to the pine trees, mountain and waves.

H.D.'s own brand of environment poem is characterised by the dualism of her naturalist/poet's eye in description and observation, and by her instinct for creating spaces in her work that allow nature to operate beyond human influence. Her "elsewhere" is one in which the wind, trees, water rule and overtake the voice of the human speaker, in order for humans to find refuge from the dissatisfactions of human society. Fletcher contends that such poetry comprises a new genre that bridges the divide between 'the opaque thingness of nature' and our theories of

³⁵ Helen Sword, *Engendering Inspiration: Visionary Strategies in Rilke, Lawrence, and H.D.* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 124.

³⁶ Debo, *H.D.'s American Landscape*, p. 19.

³⁷ Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction', *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xv-xxxvii, p. xix, as quoted in Debo, *H.D.'s American Landscape*, p. 2.

³⁸ Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 12.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

‘meaning hidden within that opaque nature’.⁴⁰ In *HERmione*, this process of projecting meaning onto nature and receiving a sense of understanding in return is prefigured in the first few pages:

The woods parted to show a space of lawn, running level with branches that, in early summer, were white with flower. Dogwood blossom. Pennsylvania. Names are in people, people are in names. Sylvania. I was born here. People ought to think before they call a place Sylvania. Pennsylvania. I am part of Sylvania. Trees. Trees. Trees. Dogwood, liriodendron with its green-yellow tulip blossoms. Trees are in people. People are in trees. Pennsylvania.⁴¹

Hermione’s longing for Point Pleasant and the seaside is not only a wish for escape or an appreciation of the shore landscape. It also tracks her development as an aspiring writer, and the natural features that make up the world around her are portrayed as in integral part in shaping her sense of what it means to be a writer. Although Hermione’s mother, Eugenia Gart, comments that she ought to go on writing her “‘dear little stories’”, this magazine writing no longer satisfies Hermione; it is ‘not writing’, and she wants to become an “‘artist’”.⁴² And for Hermione, the notion of being a literary artist is close to the idea of being a musician or painter; the inherent use and value in art is its ability to capture the ‘composition of elements’ that make up a place:

Music might have caught the trail of the grass as she ran on across the meadow and the deep note made by a fabulous bee that sprung into vision [...]. The boom of the bee in her ear, his presence like an eclipse across the sun brought visual image of the sort of thing she sought for... it had not occurred to her to try and put the thing in writing.⁴³

HERmione explicably links the landscape to the act of writing, even posits that the function of writing is to experience and understand place, to construct a yearned-for “‘elsewhere’” in order to better connect with the surrounding environment.

Reading the construction of space into H.D.’s work reveals her to be a Modernist who consistently answers Pound’s call to “‘make it new’” by creating spaces in her work where new ideas can thrive away from old forms; in particular, a movement away from pastoral landscape tropes into a more scientific and realistic understanding of the coast. H.D. manipulates the tension between landscapes that exist phenomenologically in the imagination and how these exist in the real world and uses the shore as an overarching metaphor for division. The shore divides the definition between land and sea, known and unknown, and allows H.D. to explore notions of androgynous gender and the tension between “‘elsewhere’” and “‘here’”. The tangibility and violence of her shores, and their emotional resonance for a speaker searching their landscape for meaning and self-actualisation, make her poems examples of how human meaning is both projected onto landscape and hidden in its ‘opaqueness’. H.D. wants to find an identity and a definition here for herself on the shore, but also wants to shirk it, and maximise the shore’s position as an unknown, outcast space—her work with shores is contradictory, and ironically places itself between concrete solutions. H.D. famously evades definition as a writer; she names herself Edith Gray, H.D. Imagiste, Helga Doorn, Delia Alton, each act of writing

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴¹ H.D. *HERmione*, p. 5.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 13.

embodying a new fruition of self and a new space for her to inhabit. It is perhaps in the ungendered, un-human space of nature that H.D. feels her poetic identity can be fully realised; a writer who looks for meaning both within and beyond the outline of the natural image.

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