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H.D. Prosed: The Future of an Imagist Poet

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As a scholarly field, modernism is still in its emergent phase, however dominant it may seem to its champions or residual to its detractors. Critical and pedagogical reshapings of the canon together with the release of unpublished and out-of-print materials continue to challenge any consensus about modernism even as these activities guarantee that modernism will return in ever new and diverse forms. It is impossible to predict the future of a literary period that has yet to step forth fully from the archives. Of the known letters of James Joyce, for example, approximately fourteen hundred, or just under half, remain unpublished, and that number will grow in the years to come. Editions of the correspondence of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Samuel Beckett, and other writers are in preparation. Despite the steady stream of collections of Ezra Pound's letters in the last two decades, a truly representative sampling of his vast epistolary output will be as challenging a project as a complete edition seems an unlikely one.[1] The research of Ronald Bush and Richard Taylor promises to reveal much about the genesis of Pound's *Cantos*, but as of this writing they have yet to conclude their formidable projects.[2]

Of all the modernists-in-progress none has been more dramatically altered by archival revelations than H.D. At the time of her death, in 1961, she was just beginning to emerge from the obscurity that had enveloped her and her work from the 1930s on. Between 1956 and 1961, with the help of her friend and literary advisor Norman Holmes Pearson, she published her memoir *Tribute to Freud*, her autobiographical novel *Bid Me To Live*, the long poem *Helen in Egypt*, and her *Selected Poems*. Since that time many of her earlier works have been reissued by publishers such as New Directions and Black Swan Books. Even more

striking is the list of her works published for the first time between the early 1970s and the present: the poems in *Hermetic Definition;* a memoir of Ezra Pound, *End to Torment;* an account of her childhood, *The Gift;* the autobiographical novels composed in the 1920s, *Paint It Today, HERmione* (or *HER*), and *Asphodel;* the essays *Notes on Thought and Vision* and *H.D. by Delia Alton;* the unpublished and uncollected poems printed in *Collected Poems, 1912–1944.*[3] This list could easily be extended, and editions of other unpublished writings are in preparation.

H.D.'s posthumous career is nothing short of astonishing, rivaling in quantity and quality the works she published during her lifetime. If the publication of her long poems *Helen in Egypt* and *Trilogy* forced a late revision of "H.D. Imagiste"—the poet of brief lyrics of Hellenic clarity—then the recent spate of memoirs and autobiographical novels has given us a wholly different H.D., a writer of prose works that are, in Susan Stanford Friedman's description, "gendered more directly than her lyric poetry, linguistically more experimental in its excesses . . . a difference that necessarily makes a difference in our reading practices."[4] In this essay I explore the implications of this new H.D. and give some sense of the range and quality of her prose. So rapidly have these works appeared, so avidly have they been assimilated to the polemical concerns of academic criticism—notably, revisionary feminism—that we stand in need of calm, cool assessment of our new riches. As the editor of one of H.D.'s recently released novels, *Asphodel,* I am alarmed by the lack of rigor with which some of these texts have been prepared for publication. H.D.'s particularly subtle *écriture féminine* can only benefit from careful philological work, and the future of H.D. and of her place in literary modernism may depend on the credibility of these and forthcoming editions.

The H.D. Papers at Yale University's Beinecke Library were acquired by Norman Holmes Pearson over the course of a long friendship with H.D., during which he encouraged her to send him manuscripts, including those he had urged her to write or revise, for safekeeping at Yale. At the time of her death this archive contained a veritable treasure of unpublished materials. A rough tally of the prose writings alone yields the following: nine novels, a double handful of short stories, and close to a dozen memoirs, journals, and extended essays (genres that tend to blur together in the case of H.D.). It is no exaggeration to say that until recently only a fraction of H.D.'s literary output has been known to the general reading public, and as of this writing six novels, to

say nothing of the other genres, remain unpublished ("Pilate's Wife," "Majic Ring," "The Sword Went Out to Sea," "White Rose and the Red," "The Mystery," and "Magic Mirror"). Some of these manuscripts may never find a publisher, and perhaps they should not, at least not until her published fiction has established itself more firmly and generated a stable context for the reception of new work.[5] H.D.'s careful preservation of unpublished materials puts one in mind of Emily Dickinson's meticulously packeted hymnody of the attic, her unmailed letters to the world.

An unusual feature of recent H.D. criticism has been its willingness to treat her published and unpublished writings as if they enjoyed the same sociohistorical status. At least as early as Friedman's *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (1981), works known to only a few archive-going scholars, such as *HER*, *Asphodel*, and *Paint It Today*, were receiving sustained exegesis as integral parts of H.D.'s oeuvre.[6] Frequently critics would forgo the quotation marks customarily placed around an unpublished work's title to indicate its merely potential status and use italics, as if the text were available in libraries and bookstores. Quite apart from questions of sociohistorical text production that these critics left largely unaddressed, what came into being was a set of phantom texts whose virtual reality was inseparable from the critical discourse they inhabited, for there was no way, short of visiting the Beinecke Library, to measure the accuracy of a critic's claims or to assess the true nature of the work under discussion. We were and are indebted, of course, to those who have provided snapshots of H.D.'s unpublished writings in the form of exegesis and summary, but these glimpses make it all the more imperative that we have the texts themselves, both for their intrinsic value and for the role they must play in testing and modifying the reader response they have evoked. Once published, these works take on an unprecedentedly metacritical function, for they are in a position to explicate the explicators as well as to explain themselves. But until that point we have no choice but to say, without any paradox of ontology or epistemology, that there is no text in this class; there is only an interpretive community.

The anomaly of these two faces of H.D.—the living author who participated in the shaping of her canon and the posthumous figure whose oeuvre has grown under the aegis of the academy—has led Lawrence S. Rainey to challenge this new H.D., whom he regards as little more than a species of author function "created largely in the 1980s

. . . constructed through different legal, textual, and ideological conventions, fashioned through a canon of works unlike any that prevailed in the lifetime of the earlier H.D., and forged with the assistance of an apparatus of support literature issued by biographers and scholars offering new evaluations of her work."[7] In his provocative essay "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D." Rainey finds a contradiction between the historical H.D., who led a privileged life with her wealthy companion, Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), and enjoyed the benefits of "coterie publishing," and the H.D. of the academy, who has become "the canonical figure for a poetics of political correctness," a rallying point for feminist engagements with marginality and subversiveness (116). Rainey never explains why an author who lived in material comfort should be unable to question the status quo (especially in matters of gender, sexuality, and personal identity) any more than he tackles the case of an author like Ezra Pound, whose modest means did little to temper an authoritarian politics.

Yet Rainey is right to point out that scholars have largely ignored the "specific sociohistorical matrix" in which H.D. wrote and published and, likewise, have taken for granted the new, posthumous context in which her works are produced, disseminated, and studied—though H.D. scholars are surely not the sole offenders, in this regard, among modernist critics. From these premises Rainey draws two conclusions that pervade his essay: first, that H.D.'s reluctance to submit certain of her works, notably her experimental prose writings, to the rigors of the ordinary literary marketplace stemmed from her affluent circumstances and the narcotic satisfactions conferred by an admiring coterie; and, second, that an ideologically driven academy has celebrated what it takes to be H.D.'s message—an antipatriarchal politics encoded within an avant-garde poetics—and, as a result of such content-based preoccupations, has blinded itself to formal aesthetic criteria, the real, transhistorical stuff of literary art.

Rainey's undisguised distaste for much of H.D.'s poetry and prose, for her "limited perceptions and impoverished resources of diction" (118), is conveyed with elegant authoritativeness, yet it should be evident that he deals in well-turned non sequiturs, that the aesthetic poverty he alleges does not necessarily follow from either of the sociohistorical matrices he cites: the coterie mode of production during H.D.'s lifetime or the more recent academic mode of production. He offers little in the way of proof when he does come down to cases, confining

his discussion mainly to H.D.'s poem "Leda," a work little known until recent years that he proceeds to break on the rack by comparing it line by line with Yeats's "Leda and the Swan." Also, by selectively quoting from her long poetic sequence *Trilogy*, he gives the impression that H.D.'s major effort of World War II reduces to a self-indulgent blend of astrology and pop occultism, an orgy of naive asseverations and pretty bromides. Disappointingly, Rainey does not offer comparably detailed analyses of her prose fictions and memoirs—conspicuous products of the recent H.D. boom and presumably the chief culprits in his view—and leaves us with a sense that what was to be demonstrated has been quietly evaded.

Rainey's general point about recent interpretations of H.D.'s "Leda"—that critics have ignored the history of representations of Leda's rape and consequently overstate the subversive potential of H.D.'s poem—is well taken and should be borne in mind whenever we feel tempted to make sweeping claims about an author's revisionary art. But the problem with Rainey's reading is one that typifies his entire essay: he elevates a single poem in H.D.'s corpus to representative status and offers this partial truth about the author as the whole truth about her. He also commits the fallacy of reading a reductive version of feminist criticism back into H.D.'s art and then hastens to define the latter in terms of the former, as if the two inhabited the same ontological order and historical moment. In this he reenacts the occasionally malign strategy of critics of modernism who substitute a simplified notion of New Critical formalism for the irreducibly complex poetics of writers like Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, a strategy with which Rainey probably has little patience.

I have spent so much time with Rainey's essay because it raises timely, sobering questions about the academic construction and reception of H.D. and, by implication, about the future of H.D. studies. Perhaps his most challenging suggestion is that the posthumous publication of works that H.D. herself did not try to publish is an illegitimate venture underwritten by an ideological climate and an academic agenda conveniently unaware of the historical perversion thus perpetrated. The result, according to Rainey, is a "wholesale transformation in the context for the study of her work and career" (102–3). Yet he ignores the profound continuity between the two sociohistorical matrices he himself has isolated, for the last fifteen years of H.D.'s life were marked by her gradual incorporation within the very academy that

Rainey characterizes as an opportunistic latecomer to her cause. In fact, it was his predecessor at Yale, Norman Holmes Pearson, professor of English and American Studies, who cultivated H.D.'s friendship, encouraged her to write and revise, wrote criticism of and forewords to her texts, exposed his students to her work, purchased her literary copyrights, received power of attorney, acted as her literary executor and as an intermediary with publishers, and, most important for her future reputation, collected her manuscripts and worked tirelessly to establish her papers as part of Yale's Collection of American Literature. Pearson was the personal embodiment, if anyone could be, of modernism's transition from one mode of production to another, its passage from coterie publishing, limited deluxe editions, and small readerships to the great Chautauqua of the postwar American university.

As their unpublished letters abundantly attest, H.D. depended heavily on Pearson for encouragement and advice, confessing to him in 1949, "Your spiritual help and understanding of the MSS has meant everything to me."[8] Their detailed exchanges at every stage of the composition of *Helen in Egypt* reveal an intellectual and spiritual entente of signal richness, and Pearson motivated her to complete other writings, including a number of still unpublished personal essays. His practical exertions on her behalf were no less vital to her career. Among other tasks he saw to the publication of *Bid Me To Live* by Grove Press in 1960 and arranged for the publication a year later of *Helen in Egypt*, a copy of which was placed in H.D.'s hands the day before she died. And Pearson's labors did not end with her death. As literary executor and holder of her copyrights, he saw into print *Hermetic Definition* (1972), *Trilogy* (1973), and an expanded version of *Tribute to Freud* (1974), and penned the forewords to these volumes. Writing of H.D.'s memoir *End to Torment*, Michael King notes that Pearson "encouraged H.D. to complete the memoir, gave it a title, and was preparing it for publication when he died in 1975."[9]

Works by H.D. published after Pearson's death, such as *HERmione* (1981) and *The Gift* (1982), also bear traces of his influence, and it could be argued that texts such as *Asphodel* and *Paint It Today*, both published by university presses in 1992, extend the spirit of the H.D.-Pearson collaboration into the present decade. It is undeniable that the modes of modernism's production have changed since H.D. wrote and published, but they have changed in comparable ways for all the modern-

ists, and superficial differences should not obscure the deep continuities uniting the past and the present, in particular the socioeconomic base provided by a dense nexus of university and commercial presses, undergraduate and graduate programs, changing canons and revised syllabi, publishing scholars and paying students. Modernism's history began in the flats and garrets of London and Paris, but its real success came when it entered the academy through a complex process of institutionalization that may also have been its salvation. Far from being an anomaly, the case of H.D. is a representative chapter of that history.

Despite H.D.'s failure or reluctance to publish certain works during her lifetime—whether out of fear of personal exposure, uncertainty about the quality of the writing, preference for different versions, or self-censorship in reaction to a hostile patriarchy[10]—it is equally true that from the late 1940s on she worked at revising her unpublished materials and preserving them for the "shelf" Pearson had established for her at Yale. Even when she directed that a text be "destroyed," as in the case of *Asphodel*, she usually managed to tuck a copy away for safekeeping.[11] Her letters attest to a quiet resolve, shared by Bryher and Pearson, to tidy up and preserve manuscripts for possible future publication. As late as 1959, two years before her death, H.D. was sorting through typescripts of her autobiographical novels and writing Bryher, "I don't want to discard *destructively*—so must pick sections for possible re-writing." In her reply Bryher urged her to "keep one copy at least of old manuscripts. Who knows, after Madrigal [*Bid Me To Live*, published the next year], they will probably want others."[12]

Far from flouting or distorting her intentions, then, recent editors and publishers might be said to be collaborating with H.D. in this new phase of her publishing career; the fact that in her final years she worked with Pearson to bring out several important volumes of prose and poetry, volumes she might not have published without his help, suggests that the current scholarly establishment has in a sense assumed the role that Pearson played and continues to honor, as he did, her implied last will and testament regarding her manuscripts. Again, the socioeconomic matrices linking the various H.D.s—the coterie author of private editions, the more extrovert and mainstream author of *Helen in Egypt* and *Bid Me To Live*, and the academically sponsored author of recent decades—are less discontinuous than they might seem

at first glance. All of these H.D.s have their legitimate place in the institution of modernism, and the future of that institution will no doubt see more and different H.D.s.

As of this writing, several editions of her unpublished works are in preparation. Jane Augustine has completed a new edition of *The Gift*, H.D.'s memoir of her Moravian upbringing in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. H.D. composed this work, with Pearson's encouragement, in London during World War II. German bombs fell on the city as she wrote, and the text interweaves, subtly and movingly, her past with her present, memories of her childhood in a peace-loving religious community with the fiery nightmare of embattled London. In 1982 New Directions published an abridged—some would say mutilated—version of *The Gift*, omitting substantial portions of every chapter as well as the whole of the crucial chapter 2 ("Fortune Teller"). Augustine has restored the text to its uncut form and included H.D.'s hitherto unpublished research notes on the Moravian church. Augustine is also completing an annotated edition of "The Mystery," a densely symbolic novel set in eighteenth-century Prague at an important moment in the history of the Moravian church. Completed in 1951, this work is a curious blend of modernist historiography and occultism. Its oblique narrative is ruptured by sudden shifts of character and incident that capture something of the strangeness and opacity of history itself, the apparent lack of coherence as events are unfolding counterpointed by transcendent meanings that emerge from the chaotic quotidian.[13]

Equally important are the editions-in-preparation of H.D.'s letters. Until recently only a few samples of her large correspondence have been available, mostly in scholarly journals. But recently Robert J. Bertholf has published the surviving correspondence—thirty-five letters—between H.D. and Robert Duncan. Caroline Zilboorg's *Richard Aldington and H.D.: The Early Years in Letters*, with its informative introduction and notes, is valuable even though it contains no letters by H.D. (Aldington apparently destroyed most of her early letters to him.) Zilboorg has now published a second volume covering the later years of this correspondence, in which H.D. is substantially represented.[14] Also in preparation are the letters between H.D. and Bryher during H.D.'s two analyses with Sigmund Freud in the 1930s; edited by Susan Stanford Friedman and to be published by New Directions, this volume will add to our knowledge about these sessions and the importance Freud's theories held for H.D. and her circle. Equally significant is the

edition Donna Hollenberg is preparing of the selected letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson, which will document their friendship and literary collaboration in great detail. A representative sampling of the massive H.D.-Bryher correspondence (apart from the period covered in the Friedman collection) is also badly needed, as is a more probing account of their life together than can be found in existing biographies.

The release of these volumes will strengthen the biographical and philological base of H.D. studies. It will also underscore a transformation that is already at work in the ongoing career of H.D., for in the last decade or so she has emerged as a prose writer of originality and versatility. It is no longer accurate to classify her as a poet who occasionally indulged an aberrant penchant for fiction writing and memoirs, as it was possible to do even as late as 1980. With the publication, in 1992, of *Asphodel* and *Paint It Today* the core of H.D.'s autobiographical novels, which also includes *HER* and *Bid Me To Live*, is at last readily available to scholars and students. These novels tell and retell, with different emphases and large, shifting casts of characters *à clef*, the story of H.D.'s life in Pennsylvania after meeting Ezra Pound, her subsequent romances and friendships in America and Europe (with Frances Gregg, Richard Aldington, Bryher, and others), her experiences in London during World War I, and the birth of her daughter in 1919.

The decade extending roughly from 1908 to 1918 remained for H.D., throughout her life, a haunting, traumatic period of initiation, a time of growing into history and into knowledge of expatriation, creativity, procreativity, and a complex, restless sexuality. H.D. herself referred to these novels as her "Madrigal" cycle and thought of them as a single "novel" or "story" told in different moods and modes that slowly, collectively evolved toward a satisfactory account of her life and loves in those years. She felt that this process came to fruition with her revisions of *Bid Me To Live* (which she wanted to call "Madrigal") in 1949–50: "We began on that vineyard in 1921. . . . But the grapes were sour. We went on. It was a pity to let that field (1914–1918) lie utterly fallow. We returned to it, from time to time. At last, winter 1949, we taste the 1939 gathering. Impossible but true. The War I novel has been fermenting away during War II."[15]

H.D.'s teleological language downplays the variety of forms taken by the earlier "versions" of this novel as well as the fact that each one is a discrete, unified work of art. Friedman has provided the most com-

prehensive and influential reading of the Madrigal cycle to date, arguing that *Paint It Today, Asphodel,* and *Bid Me To Live* are "distinct layers in a composite 'text' that is structured like a psyche, interpretable through the lens of psychoanalytic concepts such as the censor, the dream-work, transference, and working through."[16] Further, she sees each of the novels as shaped by a different sexual thematics: lesbian love, lesbianism grading into pregnancy and childbirth, and heterosexual love, respectively. Though at one time she considered *HER* to be part of the Madrigal cycle, Friedman now prefers to read it as a related but independent work. Her powerful analysis of these interlocking texts has much to recommend it, but it would be a shame if her boldly schematic theory were taken as definitive rather than as one suggestive way of approaching this cluster of novels.

To read these works, as Friedman does, as a series of "rescriptions" of a painful ur-story is to perceive only one trajectory of their compositional history, and her approach runs the further risk of substituting an abstract Freudian model of H.D.'s text production for local knowledge that can be obtained from more traditional philological research. Although regarded by critics prior to its publication as an early "version" of *Bid Me To Live* (a view shared by H.D. at certain points in her life), *Asphodel* is in fact a carefully wrought and snugly fitting sequel to *HER*. H.D. probably revised and polished *Asphodel* at around the time that she completed *HER*, and in later years she referred to it as "a continuation of HER."[17] Restoring the novels to their original relationship as a sequence not only provides important information about H.D.'s writing and revising practices in the 1920s, but alerts us as well to aesthetic and thematic consistencies we might otherwise miss. *Asphodel* completes the Ezra Pound and Frances Gregg stories begun in *HER* and makes use of the same fictional names for real figures that appear in that novel (George Lowndes for Ezra Pound, Fayne Rabb for Frances Gregg, and so on). Moreover, *Asphodel* richly resumes and consummates *HER*'s undulating, madrigal-like pattern of relationships, its interwoven variations on the beloved.

For all of the critical commentary that has been devoted to H.D., there have been few sustained efforts to describe the aesthetic qualities of her prose texts. The *HER-Asphodel* sequence in particular lends itself to formal analysis. Each novel is divided into two parts that contain smaller narrative divisions resembling ordinary chapters; each chapter

is in turn made up of long paragraphs that first fix an image or emotion in the manner of H.D.'s early poems, then proceed to stretch and develop it in a discourse that is private, sometimes cryptic, digressive and recursive, full of wanderings and returns. The emotional or narrative datum that initiates a rippling of consciousness may seem insignificant, like a pebble dropped in a pond, but, as in Henry James and other authors of the interior, the circles emanating concentrically and eccentrically from the event take on an independent value.

Asphodel, with its two parts consisting of fifteen chapters each, is an unusually clear example of H.D.'s love of structural patterns and parallels, of lapidary symmetries that complicate even as they assist the linear thrust of the narrative. H.D. typically and strategically has it both ways: her "borderline" temperament (a favorite concept of hers) was in one sense deeply conservative, for she desired to give up neither the static intensities of her Imagist days nor the kinetic exhilarations of her newfound narrative art. In her novels a passionate architectonics is matched by language that resists boundary and definition; ornately framed motifs (typically having to do with love, death, birth, war, and art) try to contain a feverish narrative voice that exceeds all devices for framing.

This narrative voice, which is almost always a *voice* and not an authorial presence carefully refined out of existence, is itself woven of tensions and contradictions. Often it is garrulous and informal, full of conversational tics and plucky inexactitudes that express the uneven development of the heroine, Hermione Gart (the H.D. figure), and the strain of her arduous *Bildung:* "The thing that Darrington said was not exactly the right thing to say on the verge of George Lowndes' engagement. But that was the nice thing about Darrington. He said the wrong thing in the right voice."[18] At other times a more exalted, ecstatic style and diction take over: "Is Christianity then that? Is Christ the soft mist, the blue smoke of altar incense hiding the beauty of the thing itself? Is Christianity then that, at its best, a curtain, woven of most delicate stuffs to hide reality, the white flame that is Delphi, that is Athens?" (20). Here H.D.'s Symbolist-decadent inheritance and her passion for Greece lend a hieratic breathlessness to the loose American orality of the narrative.

H.D.'s handling of dialogue is unusually skillful in *HER* and *Asphodel*, in which she uses crisp individuation and alert mimicry to exploit a wholly different aesthetic from the labile subjectivity of the nar-

rative passages. Here is George Lowndes (Ezra Pound) trying to explain to Hermione why he tried to seduce her when he was already secretly engaged:

> George had pulled her down beside him where he curled half hidden by the very grand baby-grand. "Listen Dryad darling—" "O George you might—you might have told me—" "Dryad developing a Puritan conscience—" "No. That isn't the argument. It doesn't—seem—right—" "Well, Dryad as I never see my—ah—fiancée save when surrounded by layers of its mother, by its family portraits, by its own inhibitions, by the especial curve of the spiral of the social scale it belongs to, I think you might be affable." (*Asphodel* 96)

Pound's bumptious-bohemian prolixity is nicely caught here, and H.D. is similarly successful with characters such as Jerrold Darrington (Richard Aldington), whose banter in the course of the novel registers his decline from the jaunty sensitivity of a prewar poet to the coarse jingoism of an officer on leave.

Perhaps the least discussed aspect of H.D.'s narrative language is its strange, varied rhythms and its spectral glidings from third-person-limited discourse to first-person memoir to intimate, visceral stream of consciousness. Yet it is here, if anywhere, that H.D.'s claim to a unique feminine language must be staked. In *Asphodel*, for example, when Hermione wanders the cliffs of Cornwall alone in the intervals of time spent with her new lover, Cyril Vane, a tender, contemplative interior monologue reflects her abstracted melancholy: "I am lonely in this paradise. Look at me bird, you hate me. I found you, I got you. I don't care how your parents screech and wheel above me, you are old enough to leave your nest and you fill a hollow of my arms. There is some hollow of my arms you fill. You fill it completely" (151). The pulsing, run-on clauses with their sprinkle of commas suggest a sad, displaced maternal instinct lavished on the young bird she has found, and the language hints, just barely, at her troubled awareness that she is pregnant by Vane ("I found you, I got you").

Hermione has the baby, and when her husband, Jerrold Darrington, returns from the war and in a rage breaks his promise to register the child, Phoebe, as his own, the prose records Hermione's incredulous panic: "Trampled flowers smell sweet. But there is a mur-

derous ox foot, a cloven devil foot. Was it the war simply, that walked forward that would crush with devil horns and great brute devil forehead the tenderest of growths—Phoebe. Phoebe" (198). Here an idiosyncratic, though for H.D. characteristic, use of commas—a needless inclusion here, an omission there—conveys a sense of alarm, a staggering and stumbling, a juggernaut male presence pushing past a mother to clutch at her infant. H.D.'s commas frequently have this kind of emotive-mimetic function, but just as often they pursue their own willful course. Comma phrases are often irregular, inconsistent, begun but not concluded—a series of broken pledges and torn contracts. Yet they rarely fail, however random they may seem, to discriminate some new inflection or deflection in the heroine's consciousness.

H.D.'s commas might be thought of as indicating a voice pause or a mental "breathing," an emotional hiatus rather than a division of syntax. In this they are not unlike Emily Dickinson's dashes—those rhythmic stitches taken in the text's fabric—and H.D. is no less liberal with her dashes and hyphens:

> "Will you look—after—it?" "Look after it? I only want the war to be over, us to get some way on firm ground—I only want your wishes in the matter." This is not what lizard-Hermione wanted. This is not what eel-Hermione, what alligator-Hermione, what seagull Hermione was after. (*Asphodel* 158)

It is at this busy microlevel of her prose—the level of unconsummated commas, disruptive hyphens and dashes, spellings that switch back and forth between American and British styles—that H.D.'s much-discussed female difference is so richly and materially evoked. Late in life she went through some of her earlier published prose writings, meticulously adding (less often deleting) hyphens and commas, and in this, too, she was encouraged by Pearson.[19]

Her molten, mutating accidentals are crucial to her creative project and self-expression, for they choreograph a revisionary dance with syntax, odd rhythms, and pulsations that complement the volatile narrative voice. These phenomena are entirely consistent, moreover, with theories of a maternal semiotic, or presymbolic language, which Julia Kristeva has defined as "enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written . . . rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation . . . musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a sin-

gle guarantee: syntax."[20] H.D.'s playfully errant punctuation dramatizes in microcosm themes that the narrative develops on the level of plot and character: the hyphenated maternal self, both animal and human (as in the passage quoted above); the Januslike indecisiveness of the expatriate conscience; the passion play of unintegrated bisexuality. H.D.'s gender politics of the borderline proceeds from and in turn generates an aesthetics of oscillant indeterminacy. Ideology in these texts is ultimately inseparable from the letter's subtle mode of production.

Yet recent editions of her prose writings are anything but faithful to the experimental letter of her texts. Although critics have deplored the aggressive pruning of *The Gift* by in-house editors at New Directions, no one has raised questions about the same publisher's less conspicuous but still troublesome alterations to *HER* (retitled *HERmione*). Here an irregular and unstated editorial policy saw fit to correct misspellings (such as *theorum*) in some places but not in others and to convert British spelling to American in a hit-or-miss fashion. The swarm of hyphens in H.D.'s original typescript is thinned to an occasional buzzing: curious and striking constructions such as *still-born, grave-yard, Queen-Anne's lace, wood-path, over-grown,* and *de-flowered dog-wood* are silently standardized. H.D.'s substantive intentions are also ignored, as when her archly transparent coinages, "Vanmaur" and "Point Distant," are converted by an editor's literalizing pen back to "Bryn Mawr" and "Point Pleasant." Other interventions include deletions of phrases and sentences and several ad lib decisions to begin a new chapter where H.D. indicated only a line break. These changes do not drastically affect the spirit of her work, but they point to a certain disregard for the aesthetic specifications of her text.

New Directions retains, laudably, the enthusiasm of the avant-garde concern that James Laughlin founded in 1936 to publish works by Pound, Williams, and other living writers. To some extent their assertive editing of H.D.'s texts reflects the spirit of active collaboration with authors that prevailed in earlier decades, and New Directions has never pretended to be a scholarly publisher, despite the fact that classroom and academic sales now constitute one of its chief markets. University presses, targeting new audiences generated by women's studies programs, have also begun to add H.D.'s writings to their lists, but it is not certain at this point that a higher standard of editing will result. Feminist scholars, who might reasonably be looked to as custodians of

H.D.'s intricate *écriture féminine*, have not uniformly taken pains to develop coherent policies of editing but, instead, have devoted their energies to providing biographical and critical orientations, sometimes to the neglect of the less spectacular rigors of responsible textual editing.

A case in point is the edition of H.D.'s *Paint It Today* published in 1992 by New York University Press in its series "The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature." The editor, Cassandra Laity, devotes more than twenty pages of useful introduction to the thesis that this novella, written in 1921, is one of H.D.'s "most overtly homoerotic novels" and pursues this claim with the somewhat contradictory argument that the work's lesbian discourse is "extremely coded," a lyrical transposing of Romantic conventions for the purpose of recording "transgressive desire."[21] In contrast to this sustained exposition, she spends exactly two sentences discussing the challenges of editing H.D.: "The novel is published here exactly as H.D. wrote it. With the exception of typographical and grammatical corrections, and the transformation of British spelling and usage to its American counterpart, the text is presented in its original form" (xxxviii). Tantalizingly vague phrases—"exactly as H.D. wrote it," "in its original form"—jar with confessions of editorial intervention and tell us nothing about the archival status of the text: how many versions exist, whether it is in manuscript or typescript or both, what related documents (such as the portion of *Paint It Today* published some years ago or other published or unpublished texts by H.D.) were enlisted to identify and adjudicate textual error.

Laity's edition does not present *Paint It Today* "exactly as H.D. wrote it." In the space of a single chapter consisting of eight pages in her edition (chap. 6, "Sister of Charmides") she has altered (added or deleted) nearly forty commas, over twenty-five hyphens, and has made changes to capitalization, italics, and other features of H.D.'s typescript. As promised in her brief note on the text, she consistently alters British spelling to American style and regularizes usage (*dreamt* becomes *dreamed* [63])—operations that erase H.D.'s characteristic wavering between British and American forms and thus expunge one textual manifestation of her expatriate sensibility. Substantive changes seem even more meddlesome: H.D.'s archaic *drear* becomes *dreary* (59); the expressive inversion "interdependent one on another" becomes the flat "interdependent on one another" (61). Inattention or eye skip is perhaps responsible for the change from "startled at its beauty" to "startled by

its beauty" and "our old selves" to "our selves" (65). Misreading turns "His head" into "His hand" (62) and "full leafed spring trees" into paradoxically "fall-leafed spring trees" (64). Despite the assurance in her textual note that misspellings will be attended to, Laity allows *Mycene* to stand (62) and substitutes her own "Luxumbourg gardens" (59) for H.D.'s "Luxumburg gardens."[22]

Errors of execution aside, Laity is free, of course, to pursue any editorial policy she chooses, but some record of her procedures should be made available to scholars. As long as H.D.'s texts are so blithely changed to conform to prevailing (academic) standards of spelling and usage, at the expense of the teeming textual details on the pages of her typescripts, it will be hard to believe that critics are truly committed to the contradictory play of her feminine discourse, to the "difference" her texts evince at the level of words, variant spellings, commas, and hyphens. In this respect, as in others, H.D. studies lag behind work on other modernist figures, such as Joyce, Pound, Williams, and Woolf. Criticism and theory, however ambitious and illuminating, will not be enough to sustain H.D. through the changing critical fashions of the years to come. We need access to more of her unpublished correspondence and personal essays. Regularly updated bibliographies, sound biographies and source studies, detailed annotations of her densely allusive texts, have yet to be produced, though such apparatus have long existed for other modernists.[23] Lacking a stable philological foundation—which must include informed textual editing—a superstructure consisting entirely of critical and theoretical writing bears too heavy a burden, and the chief casualty will be H.D. herself, whose bid for canonization will be lost in the collapse.[24]

Criticism and theory are important, but they should remain flexible and responsible. The strategy of "decoding" H.D.'s writings, from her early lyrics in *Sea Garden* (1916) to recently published works such as *Paint It Today*, seeks to go beneath aesthetic conventions to locate personal and social realities that concerned H.D. and her friends: lesbian and heterosexual desire, the constraints of gender, the circumstances of the female artist.[25] We should take care, however, that our decoding does not yield the same message over and over again, that these "codes"—which are, after all, the aesthetic forms H.D. chose for her craft—do not become mere husks that we remove and discard in our quest for thematic kernels. Decoding H.D. without cherishing the code

itself opens the way for a critical opportunism that might end by depriving her of her painstaking achievement.

Impatient as she sometimes was of "H.D. Imagiste," Hilda Doolittle remained proud of her early career, just as surely as she did not fear to venture beyond the security of a limited fame in pursuit of nonpoetic genres. Recognizing differences among the various interwoven H.D.s that literary history shows us is as important as perceiving difference within her texts. H.D.'s autobiographical novels remind us that things we often take to be fixed or given—love, sexuality, gender, the boundary between poetry and prose—are caught up in creative, often painful negotiations, tautly braided opposites that cannot be disentwined by any ingenious decoding, whether the critic's or the artist's. The nervously oscillating consciousness of *HER* and *Asphodel* strains to inhabit past forms and selves without becoming mired in them, a both/and passion that informs everything from H.D.'s representations of bisexuality to her asides on the predicament of the expatriate artist: "We are here. We are *there.* We will go mad being here and there unless we give up simply, stay here and are lost, stay there and are dead. To be here and there at the same time, that is the triumph" (*Asphodel* 46). Living life on the borderline, expatriated from her native land no less than from any doctrine of the old stable ego, Hermione Gart knows that madness may be the price of refusing fixity. Claire Buck aptly cautions H.D. critics against the "use of the 'I' of the texts as a confirmation and defense of an essential female subject."[26]

We have the good fortune to be able to observe a career in Phoenix-like rebirth, a neglected modernist entering a bright new phase at a rather terrific speed. H.D. the poet is becoming, with equal power and dignity, H.D. the prose writer. This is one meaning of my title. But H.D. is in danger of being "prosed" in another sense. Critics and editors are too ready to thematize her newly published writings in accordance with reigning theoretical categories and ideological tastes and are less prepared to do the work of responsible editing, patient explication, and self-effacing annotation, which, if less glamorous, may be a surer means in the long run of promoting her work and showcasing its beauties. In particular, the *écriture féminine* of her prose memoirs and fictions must be allowed, within the limits of editorial responsibility and publishers' constraints, to be heard in all its otherness—from the largest motifs to the smallest accidentals—and not be made a mere instantiation of our

current preoccupations. No longer reduced to quoted snippets held captive within our critical discourse, H.D.'s prose difference must be emancipated from our eager patronage in other ways as well.

NOTES

1. A. Walton Litz is currently addressing himself to this challenge: a new selected letters of Ezra Pound (to be published by New Directions Publishing Corp.), a badly needed update of *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (1950; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1971).

2. Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's "Cantos"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976), and Taylor, *Variorum Edition of "Three Cantos" by Ezra Pound: A Prototype* (Bayreuth: Boomerang, 1991), are important contributions to our understanding of Pound's compositional process. Bush is currently studying archival materials relating to the growth of the Pisan Cantos, and Taylor is at work on a complete, computer-generated variorum of published versions of the *Cantos*.

3. A list of H.D.'s works mentioned in this essay, together with relevant dates of composition, is appended at the conclusion.

4. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 32.

5. Some of these unpublished novels strike even a sympathetic reader as very long, forbiddingly private, at times diffuse and repetitious. H.D. tried and failed to place two or three of these works with publishers.

6. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981). Other studies that include sustained discussion of unpublished works are Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); and *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. Friedman and DuPlessis (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990).

7. Lawrence S. Rainey, "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D.," in *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, ed. George Bornstein (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991) 102. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

8. Letter from H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 8 August 1949; quoted in Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 371 n. 35.

9. H.D., *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound*, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson and Michael King (New York: New Directions, 1979) xi.

10. I give here the chief reasons offered by critics, feminist and nonfeminist, for H.D.'s accumulation of unpublished manuscripts. Each of these factors played a role at some point, and all are attested by H.D.'s correspondence and by other sources.

11. Rainey notes that H.D. scrawled "Destroy" on the sole surviving typescript of *Asphodel*, adding that "it says much about her own opinion of her work, which may have been prompted by shrewd self-assessment" (104). Here he mischievously credits H.D. with an aesthetic taste he denies her elsewhere. It is true that she came to feel that *Asphodel* was a less effective version of *Bid Me To*

Live, but this was due mainly to her delight at completing the latter novel, a work quite different from the earlier *Asphodel*. Rainey also fails to mention that the surviving typescript of *Asphodel* is a carbon copy and that in the last decade of her life, as her correspondence at the Beinecke Library indicates, she tried to round up and destroy extra copies of her manuscripts. Rainey faults H.D. scholars for disregarding philological matters, but an inspection of the archival record housed at his own institution would have enlightened him on this matter. See also Spoo, "H.D.'s Dating of *Asphodel:* A Reassessment," *H.D. Newsletter* 4 (1991): 31–40.

12. From unpublished letters by H.D. to Bryher, 12 October 1959, and by Bryher to H.D., 14 October 1959, in the H.D. Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

13. Portions of "The Mystery" were published in a limited edition prepared by Eric W. White, *Images of H.D. and from "The Mystery"* (London: Enitharmon, 1976). The manuscript materials for "The Mystery" as well as for "The Gift" are at the Beinecke Library, Yale.

14. *A Great Admiration: H.D. / Robert Duncan Correspondence, 1950–1961*, ed. Robert J. Bertholf (Venice, CA: Lapis, 1992); *Richard Aldington and H.D.: The Early Years in Letters*, ed. Caroline Zilboorg (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991); *Richard Aldington and H.D.: The Later Years in Letters*, ed. Zilboorg (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995).

15. H.D., *H.D. by Delia Alton* (*Notes on Recent Writing*), ed. Adalaide Morris, *Iowa Review* 16 (1986): 212.

16. Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, xi.

17. Letter of H.D. to Bryher, 18 April 1949; quoted in H.D., *Asphodel*, ed. Robert Spoo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992) xiii.

18. *Asphodel*, 100. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

19. A case in point is H.D.'s *Kora and Ka* (Dijon: Darantiere, 1934), two "long-short stories" ("Kora and Ka" and "Mira-Mare") published together in a small volume of just under one hundred pages of text. In the 1950s she carefully marked corrections in two personal copies of the work. By my rough count she added 145 hyphens, deleting none, and inserted 55 commas, removing only 9. On receiving corrected copies of *Kora and Ka* and other works from H.D., Norman Holmes Pearson wrote to her: "The whole matter of corrected copies is a good thing. . . . I am not really thinking of typographical errors, but a feeling for commas, hyphens, the occasional word" (unpublished letter, 19 April 1959). The Pearson letter and the corrected copies of *Kora and Ka* are at the Beinecke Library, Yale. New Directions has reissued *Kora and Ka* in its Bibelot series, with an introduction and note on the text by Robert Spoo. The text is a photoreproduction of the limited Darantiere edition of 1934. The note on the text lists the substantive changes that H.D. wished to see incorporated.

20. Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 97.

21. H.D., *Paint It Today*, ed. Cassandra Laity (New York: New York UP, 1992) xvii, xxi. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

22. I do not mean to imply that the editorial policy I adopted for *Asphodel*,

detailed in my edition (xvi–xix), is unassailable but merely that such a policy should be accessible. See Robert Spoo, "Editing H.D.'s *Asphodel*: Selected Emendations and Notes," *Sagetrieb* 14 (Spring and Fall 1995): 13–26.

23. An important recent contribution to H.D. studies is Michael Boughn's *H.D.: A Bibliography, 1905–1990* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993), which covers both primary and secondary materials. H.D. scholarship is moving so rapidly, however, that bibliographic updates are already needed.

24. A disturbing sign was the recent demise of the *H.D. Newsletter*, founded by Eileen Gregory in 1987 for the purpose of disseminating biographical, bibliographical, and other research-oriented information about H.D. Essays of a strictly critical nature were not ordinarily accepted. Gregory, who edited the journal, told me that a large factor in her decision to discontinue it was the paucity of appropriate submissions.

25. For analyses of H.D.'s "encoded" poetry and fiction, see Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 51–62; Laity, "H.D.'s Romantic Landscapes: The Sexual Politics of the Garden," in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, 110–28; and Laity's introduction to *Paint It Today*.

26. Claire Buck, "Freud and H.D.—bisexuality and a feminine discourse," *m/f* 8 (1983): 59.

WORKS BY H.D.

The following is a list of H.D.'s works cited in my essay. Where relevant, I have included dates of composition.

Asphodel. Ed. Robert Spoo. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992. Written 1921–22, 1926–27.

Bid Me To Live: A Madrigal. 1960. Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan, 1983. Written 1939, 1947–50.

Collected Poems, 1912–1944. Ed. Louis L. Martz. New York: New Directions, 1983.

End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound. Ed. Norman Holmes Pearson and Michael King. New York: New Directions, 1979. Written 1958.

The Gift. New York: New Directions, 1982. Written 1941–44.

H.D. by Delia Alton (*Notes on Recent Writing*). Ed. Adalaide Morris. *Iowa Review* 16 (1986): 174–221. Written 1949–50.

Helen in Egypt. New York: Grove, 1961. Written 1952–55.

Hermetic Definition. New York: New Directions, 1972. Written 1957–61.

HERmione. New York: New Directions, 1981. Written 1926–27, 1930.

Kora and Ka. Dijon: Imprimerie Darantiere, 1934. Written 1930. Reissued, with an introduction and note on the text by Robert Spoo. New York: New Directions, 1996.

Notes on Thought and Vision. San Francisco: City Lights, 1982. Written 1919.

Paint It To-Day (first four chaps. only). Ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis. *Contemporary Literature* 27 (1986): 441–74. Written 1920–21.

Paint It Today (complete). Ed. Cassandra Laity. New York: New York UP, 1992.
Selected Poems. New York: Grove, 1957.
Tribute to Freud. 1945–46, 1956. New York: New Directions, 1974. Written 1944, 1948.
Trilogy. New York: New Directions, 1973. Written 1942, 1944.