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HER READING *HER*:
H.D.'S NARRATIVE OF THE DAUGHTER

by

Jacqueline Larson
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1986

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
English

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
February 1992

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ISBN 0-315-83689-X

Canada

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DEGREE: Master of Arts (English)

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*Her Reading Her : H.D.'s Narrative of the
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ABSTRACT

H.D. wrote *HER* as a roman à clef in the year following her mother's death. In the novel she explores maternal loss and the narrative working-through that ensues with recognition of this loss for the daughter as a writing subject. Narrated from a third person perspective about a character, Her Gart, who goes by the third person pronoun as proper name, the novel textually reenacts the daughter's struggle to separate from her mother and distinguish herself as a speaking subject. Its shifting points of view, pronominal play, metonymic associations and collapsed chronology function to engage and to implicate the reader in the character's delirium.

Rather than describing the daughter's psychic configurations, this novel "does" to the reader what Eugenia Gart "does" to her daughter; like Her Gart she is confronted with both a prohibition against maternal criticism and the simultaneous need to speak out from maternal (or in this case a textual) symbiosis. This problem remains a blind spot to contemporary critics who argue that H.D. subverts the narrative paradigms of heterosexual romance in order to valorize lesbian relationship, both in the novel and in "life," as emancipatory choices for female subjects. While the novel does interrogate romance genres, both in narrative and in psychosexual "life," it also establishes, in H.D.'s words, the "powerless, all-powerful" maternal figure as the ambivalent ground for these narrative explorations.

In order to "author" herself, Her Gart has to break her idealized maternal bond, a bond which is made known only by the narrator as a later self retroactively recognizing a pattern of her own making. This retroactive recognition makes for a narrative that collapses the distinction between the 'now' of narration and the thing accounted. The reader finds herself confronting obstacles very much like those faced by Her Gart—inside the thing thought to be analyzed from the outside. She, too, has to become conscious of covert maternal prohibitions that are simultaneously revealed and concealed within the narrative. *HER* thus exposes much more than the heterosexual romance paradigm; H.D. transforms accepted notions of self and memory, of subject and object, and of biography through a representation of "her" self as a fiction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Roy Miki for his encouragement and unflagging patience as well as Andrea Lebowitz for her interest and advice.

I also want to thank Jin-me Yoon who has been stubborn, supportive and inspiring from the earliest days, Julia Steele who has been a sympathetic fellow traveller, and Nelia Tierney who continues to nourish my work and focus my attention toward "the thing back of the thing."

And especially, I want to thank Jodey Castricano— her keen insight, her unbounded optimism and her love have greatly increased my freedom.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is perhaps Western culture's earliest narrative of what Adrienne Rich has called "the essential female tragedy," that is, "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter" (in Kloepfer, 173). Most accounts of that myth focus not on Persephone's loss of her mother but on Demeter's loss. Nor Hall, in her paraphrase of Homer, describes Demeter as the "bringer of seasons and giver of perfect gifts" (72) as she searches for her "trim-ankled daughter whom . . . Hades rapt away" (70):

how she refused to speak . . . because of her sorrow, and greeted no one by word or by sign, but rested, never smiling, and tasting neither food nor drink, because she pined with longing for her deep-bosomed daughter (73)

The tale accounts for how, in the mother's sorrow and rage,

. . . she caused a most dreadful and cruel year for mankind over the all-nourishing earth [and]. . . so she would have destroyed the whole race of man with cruel famine and have robbed them who dwell on Olympus of their glorious right of gifts and sacrifices, had not Zeus prevailed and marked this in his heart. (73-74)

This is a narrative of the mother's loss, the mother's desire for her child. Because of this maternal focus, the classical account has very little to say about Persephone's experience, which is significant if myth is, as Nor Hall has claimed in her discussion of this mother/daughter story, one way of articulating "complex and essential psychic facts" (69). The "psychic fact" of this myth is that the daughter's story may be largely determined, if not actually obliterated, by her mother's point of view.

In her reading of the myth, Nini Herman argues that prior to her abduction, Persephone was already striving to put some distance between herself and her mother,

which suggests she displayed signs of a mind which was her own, pointing to the dissolution of the symbiotic bonds, at least on the daughter's side. (56)

That is, she was *apart* from her mother, gathering flowers with "the deep-bosomed daughters of Oceanus" when she came upon the radiant narcissus which "smelled most sweetly so that all wide heaven above and the whole earth and the sea's salt swell laughed for joy." Herman focuses on this detail of Persephone's initial gesture of separation because, reading closely, she finds that

it would seem that she was drawn into the 'paternal circuit' from the maternal one, not nearly as unwillingly as a more conventional and superficial reading would have us believe. (56)

This notion of Persephone's willing separation is certainly borne out when we read that after she reached out "for the marvellous flower," and was caught up and taken away,

then she cried out shrilly with her voice, calling upon her father, the son of Chronos, who is most high and excellent. But no one, either of the deathless gods or of mortal men, heard her voice, nor yet the olive trees bearing rich fruit: only tender hearted Hecate . . . (70)

By crying out to her father at this moment of crisis, Persephone may recognize that while her mother may be "the giver of perfect gifts," there are limits to the range of her power. Demeter eventually does hear her daughter's cry of alarm, since ". . . the heights of the mountains and the depths of the sea rang with her immortal voice," but she hears the cry too late, and searches unsuccessfully for ten days before Hecate finally helps. (It is significant that a woman unrelated to the family is the one to hear Persephone.) Although she has control over the seasons

and the earth's fertility, Demeter cannot prevent the inner promptings that spur her daughter's desire. But whether or not Persephone desires experience of a sphere apart from her mother's—whether or not it is in her best interest to be kept close to her mother—does not really come into question. After all, this is the *Hymn to Demeter* not a song of her child, and so the narrative focuses our sympathies on the mother's "longing for her deep-bosomed daughter." However, if there was a "Hymn to Persephone," we would have a very different account of the mother/daughter dyad.

A reader informed by psychology or sociology as the modern explanations of "psychic facts" might agree with one psychoanalytic claim that

"[t]he person of the mother herself has a special significance here. It is the *love for the mother* that causes the gravest difficulty for the little girl." (Alice Balint in Chodorow, 124)

"The gravest difficulty" for Persephone is that she loves a mother who desires to keep her close. Because Demeter does not seem able to see Persephone as a person separate from herself, the mother and daughter are caught in the sort of condition, so thoroughly documented by Chodorow in her study, *The Reproduction of Mothering*; that is,

... the mother does not recognize or denies the existence of the daughter as a separate person, and the daughter herself then comes not to recognize, or to have difficulty recognizing, herself as a separate person. (103)

Traditionally, the ancient Greek story has been shaped to explain issues other than a daughter's experience of her mother. The myth focuses on the union of mother and daughter as a necessity for the earth's fertility, not as a problem for Persephone. The Eleusinian rites which later enacted the myth interpreted the loss and return of Persephone as an allegory of planting and harvesting. However,

I see the myth as an enactment of the mother's reluctant transfer of her child to the (male) world.

Hades as a representative of this male world certainly finds Demeter's hold on her daughter a problem since he desires Persephone's company. His preference for the daughter indicates that he distinguishes between the women, and also that he is an agent of separation for his young bride. To the extent he manages to interrupt the dyad, he functions in the role of what Kristeva calls the "paternal, symbolic order" (Gallop, *DS*, 115); he distinguishes mother from daughter and provides the narrative or the language which represents them. For example, one version of this myth says that the girl cried out to her mother at the moment of her abduction or seduction, but Demeter here does not seem any better able than Zeus to hear her daughter.

When in fright she dropped the corners of her apron and let the flowers fall, childlike she felt the loss of them as an addition to her grief.
(Bullfinch, 52)

When her mother does not hear her, Persephone presumably loses more than her apron-full of flowers; in "addition to her grief" and fear, she also loses what Gallop has called the "... comforting belief in the omnipotent Mother who guards and can ensure the daughter's life " (*DS*, 115). When Persephone is "de-flowered" in the transfer from her maternal enclosure, she loses both her mother and her infantile idealization of maternal omnipotence; it is Hades who occasions both losses.

Without Hades' intervention, there would be no story. As one modern reader of the *Homeric Hymn* has argued,¹

¹ Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* argues that the Demeter/Persephone myth is a narrative model for most if not all modernist texts by women, i.e. a revision of "Oedipal" narratives.

... loss itself provides the occasion for the story's inception. . . . It is only when Hades abducts Persephone that mother and daughter enter time. . . . Hades occasions both the separation and a narrative which will repair the breach. (Hirsch, 5)

This claim suggests that loss is the prerequisite for "a narrative that will repair the breach," and that the figure of Hades, a male "third party" to the dyad, is necessary in order to even speak about the mother and daughter. It would seem, as Juliette Mitchell says, "that the relation of mother and child cannot be viewed outside the structure established by the position of the father" (in Kloepfer, 2). This "structure established by the position of the father" has been called by modern critics a psychological necessity. Julia Kristeva, for example, talks about "civilization's requirement of a stern father who, through his Name, brings separation, judgement and identity" (KR, 261); and Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* explores how women have little access to self knowledge and, in our present psychological economy, no value in themselves without the intervention of a speculating third party (261). In Homer's *Hymn to Demeter*, Hades functions as this third party intervenor between mother and daughter; he occasions, in this story, a degree of "separation, judgement, and identity."

Persephone, however, still spends at least part of each year within the absorbing maternal sphere of her famous mother, which implies that the "stern father" is not as strong as he might seem when he tries to come between mother and daughter. Hades certainly seems aware of the mother's emotional magnetism:

... he on his part secretly gave her [Persephone] sweet pomegranate to eat, taking care for himself that she might not remain continually with grave, dark-robed Demeter. (Hall, 74)

That he does this to his bride *secretly* suggests his own doubts about her loyalties. By his cunning, he keeps the younger goddess away from her mother for his share of the year. This seasonal arrangement subsequently turns into the Eleusinian

mystery rites, a celebration of Demeter's losing and finding of her daughter, a celebration of Demeter the corn goddess and her daughter the seed—different aspects of the same entity. Perhaps this incomplete separation, combined with the ancient world's narrative focus on the figure of the mother, is what prevents Persephone's story from being told.

* * *

It is *she* who matters. . . . About *her*, there is no question. The trouble is, she knows so many people and they come and interrupt. And besides that, she likes my brother better. If I stay with my brother, become part almost of my brother, perhaps I can get nearer to *her* If one could stay near her always, there would be no break in consciousness.

-H.D., *Tribute to Freud*

[There is] not only a linguistic but an erotic component to relation with the mother: she is *unspoken* both because representation requires her repression and because releasing her in the economy of desire, is illicit (incestuous) and therefore *unspeakable*.

-Deborah Kloepfer, *The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D.*

In her study of H.D. and Jean Rhys, Deborah Kloepfer has found that maternal loss is concurrent with "linguistic alienation" in these writers which

implies that rather than just dealing with women's experience thematically, these women are also experimenting linguistically and that there is a direct encoding of the mother in relation to language.
(15)

This "encoding of the mother in relation to language" makes the daughterly text a process for reconciling "the debilitating and sometimes maddening desire for and rejection of the mother" (22), a process which often subverts the very premise of language—"that to write means to relinquish the mother." Kloepfer argues that

the writing daughter's story of her mother, both "gives birth to the self and threatens to destroy it," because a writing daughter faces a double bind. Writing or representation requires the repression or relinquishing of the mother, but as Nancy Chodorow has found from psychoanalysis, a "girl never gives up her mother as a *love* object, even if she becomes heterosexual" (127). The daughter's story thus becomes, paradoxically, a way of both separating and staying close. So, one might well expect ambivalence and contradictions in such writing; as Klopfer finds,

. . . the story of the mother, the story of earliest relation with her, loss of her, desire for her, [is] . . . of rage and fear, fear of finding her, fear of not. To "tell" her is somehow to kill her; to refuse to tell her is to die." (43)

HER: H.D.'s novel is such an account of the daughter's "desire for and rejection of" her mother. The novel's narrative begins after Her Gatt has already "lost" her mother and looks back to the time preceding the recognition of this loss. This is important biographically, in view of the fact that H.D. wrote the novel in the year following her mother's death. However, while biography is important to a reading of the text, since H.D., like so many of her contemporaries, reworks her personal history in her fiction, I do not take a strict roman à clef approach because such an approach would occlude the novel; the "key" to the text would be determined by a desire for mastery of the so-called biographical "facts," and a search for these details as they are borne out by the fiction. This search for historical truth in the novel becomes very problematic in the work of many critics. Barbara Guest, for example, puzzles over *HER* as it relates to H.D.'s "real" experience and indiscriminately blurs the distinction between the text's constructed characters and the biographical Hilda Doolittle. Guest writes,

"She was a disappointment to her father, an odd duckling to her mother, an importunate overgrown unincarnated entity that had no place here" was H.D.'s melancholy description of herself in 1909. (22)

I indicate biographical details when they seem to suggest resonances for further consideration. My interests, however, lie in a reading of *HER* as a modernist experimental text through which the daughter can come to terms with what ends up being her fantasy of a lost maternal territory, *once she has left it*. As in the Demeter/Persephone model I described above, "loss itself provides the occasion for the story's inception."

The loss which initiates "the story's inception" precedes the events narrated although it is nonetheless inscribed within the narrative. As psychoanalytic criticism has shifted its focus from the author to the language of the text itself, so too do I proceed by examining H.D.'s play with language and its discursive forms as an inscription of maternal loss. The terrain of the lost mother is, primarily, a fantasy, considering that the preoedipal experience of fusion with the mother precedes the subject's entry into language; it is a state "anterior to the perception of loss" (Kloepfer, 85). Julia Kristeva claims that this fantasy of fusion is the primary "stuff" with which an individual has to struggle in order to come into her own language; that a "... speaking being must engage in a struggle with the imaginary mother, for whom it will eventually constitute an object separated from the Ego" (*KR*, 257). Kristeva's notion of the psychological struggle to separate from this "imaginary mother" can also serve as a description of what a daughter is up against, particularly when she strives to write but finds herself in a family where the role of daughter is opposed to that of writer.

HER is a narrative re-enactment of such a struggle. In the thesis that follows I explore how the proleptic narrative's simultaneous retroaction and anticipation textually re-enacts the daughter's psychological process of separating from her

family in the constitution of her writerly subjectivity. Lacan's famous "mirror-stage" model, although it refers specifically to infant development, provides insights into the novel's narrative technique. H.D.'s text involves a "temporal dialect" similar to Lacan's metaphoric mirror with its fantasies of loss and anticipation of wholeness; that is, "the self is constituted through anticipating what it will become, and then this anticipatory model is used for gauging what was before" (Gallop, *RL*, 81). Since reading involves what Wolfgang Iser calls "a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it is to apprehend" (115), the reader is made, through H.D.'s adroit technique, to occupy a position similarly determined by anticipation and retroaction, a position sometimes as shaky as the character's.

We read, for example,

She could not then know that the reason for failure of a somewhat exaggeratedly-planned "education," was possibly due to subterranean causes. She had not then dipped dust-draggled, intellectual plumes into the more modern science that posts signs over emotional bog and intellectual lagoon ("failure complex," "compensation reflex") to show us where we may or may not stand. (4)

The reader focuses on Her Gart who has not *yet* acquired the language she anticipates, not on the narrator who ironically presents the inadequacies of "the more modern science," thereby getting caught within the focalizing character's strange psychic landscape, and like Her, needing to explicate that terrain as a way to master the uncanny effects of the emotional bog in H.D.'s text. This desire to somehow "get it" is the movement thus described by Roland Barthes: "[t]o move from reading to criticism is to change desires; it is no longer to desire the work but to desire one's own language" (in Kristeva, *DL*, 115). If an entry into "one's own language" involves, as I have mentioned earlier, the struggle with "the imaginary mother," *HER* inspires the anxiety of such a struggle because the reader is made to

share Hermione's anxiety and delirium, share a vertigo which manifests itself in language similar to that Kristeva defines when she speaks of delirium as

a discourse which has supposedly strayed from a presumed reality. The speaking subject is presumed to have known an object, a relationship, an experience that he is henceforth incapable of reconstituting accurately. Why? Because the knowing subject is also a *desiring* subject and the paths of desire ensnarl the paths of knowledge. (KR, 307)

The text's account of Her Gart's discourse, rather than straying from a presumed reality, *indicates* her reality:

She said, "I'm too pretty. I'm not pretty enough." She dragged things down to the banality, "People don't want to marry me. I don't want to marry people." She concluded, "One has to do something." (5)

She tries to speak for herself, switching back and forth from the grammatical subject to the position of object, but she seems to inhabit a terrain she is "incapable of reconstituting accurately." Yet the text is this accurate reconstitution of her emotional "marsh and bog." The motif of coming into a creative and personal voice for the writing daughter makes this novel a *kunstlerroman*, but unlike the traditional artist whose quest takes him out into the world, Her Gart journeys *in*. The novel delineates the daughter's struggle against a "Demeterian" maternal fusion and presents this struggle, fraught as it is with ambivalence, as the most difficult and absolutely necessary challenge for a young woman writer. In the process of her "self-making," Her Gart comes to see her family as inadequate grounding for her creative needs; comes to see a disparity between her imagined "all powerful" mother and the self-effacing woman who fails to encourage the autonomy upon which her identity depends. This recognition is partly aided by the experience of a lesbian relationship, represented as an encounter with a more exciting, if dangerous story than that offered by the prescripts of heterosexual

romance. (Perhaps Her Gart's friend Fayne plays the role of Hecate here.)
 Hermione Gart tries on various psycho-social roles, so to speak, in her attempt to find an adequate position for herself. Once she consciously acknowledges her mother's emotional absence, she symbolically (or imaginatively) constitutes a maternally connoted space for herself (in this case along an axis of matri-sexuality), in order to say "I" as a producer of her own text.

As a modernist, H.D. addresses the contradictions between "love" and "quest" themes in her *kunstlerroman* but unlike her male peers who, "despite their reconstruction of culture . . . repeat tradition where male/female relations are concerned" (Duplessis in King, 90), she locates the woman writer's principle struggle for her voice in the family, an analysis of which ". . . is an essential basis for the understanding of culture, myth and history" (90). This notion of the family as a basis for insight into history and culture is one of Freud's basic premises. H.D., in her analysis with "the professor," basically agreed with this idea, but her particular focus on "the unspeakable mother" took her even deeper into the taboos and contradicting desires of a woman writer in that "history."

Like Persephone who divides her time between her husband and her mother, Her Gart also oscillates in her loyalties, but her mother remains a problematic emotional ground. "She loved Eugenia *but she could not stay*" (my emphasis). She needs her mother but she also needs her own voice; she has to posit an adequate mother with a fiction of her. As Marianne Hirsch writes of Demeter and Persephone, the "mother/daughter narrative is resolved through continued opposition, interruption and contradiction" (Hirsch, 35). Opposition and contradiction is certainly everywhere in H.D.'s text, perhaps because, as Duplessis has said of her:

She is permanently wavering. . . . She is muse and she is poet. Two-faced doors. Because the culture into which she is about to step, in which she wants to participate, is the site at which she is negated. She is the anti-body. She steps forward. What will bouy her up? Nothing? (King, 76)

CHAPTER 1

What if the Object Should Speak?

Her Gart went round in circles. "I am Her," she said to herself; she repeated, "Her, Her, Her." Her Gart tried to hold onto something; drowning she grasped, she caught at a smooth surface, she cried in her dementia, "I am Her, Her, Her."

- H.D., *HER*

H.D.'s novel might have been written into the anticipated space of Luce Irigaray's famous question, "What if the object should speak?" (*Speculum*, 135). If the object *should* speak, it would probably sound like Her Gart as she stammers and repeats "I am Her. . . . Her, Her, Her."² The character who struggles to name herself in this strange utterance "crie[s] in her dementia" and slides from the grammatical subject to the sentence's object, from the first to the third person positions with unsettling speed. This stammering is as psychologically untenable for her as it is for the reader subject to the sentence's blurring of subject/object distinctions, yet while most readers agree that *HER* explores the gender issues around artistic identity, few have critically examined the problematics of this so-called identity as it is represented in the novel.

Susan Friedman, for example, discusses Hermione's ambivalence toward her fiancé George Lowndes, then claims that her lesbian experience with Fayne Rabb is free of such ambivalence; indeed that this alternative sexuality is what inspires Hermione's art: ". . .merging with her sister-ideal brings [Her Gart] her first confident assertion of identity" (*PR*, 42-44). Rachel Blau Duplessis also valorizes the lesbian

²To distinguish between H.D.'s ellipses and my own, I will designate the novel's ellipses with closely spaced marks (...) and my own with the openly spaced marks (. . .).

encounter, arguing that Hermione refuses the "object status of the heterosexual paradigm" (in Friedman, 41). While both critics are aware of a problem regarding "object status" neither Friedman nor Duplessis explore the implications of a woman's "subject status" as it is conveyed by these portrayals of sister-love nor by what means "merging with" an ideal can possibly constitute one's identity. Their confident assertions of Her Gatt's discovery of her identity suggest a belief in a solid, discoverable and unified self—a notion which the text does not support. H.D. is interested in the problematics of identity, but nothing in her novel's slippery textual surfaces suggests the unitary self found by Duplessis or Friedman.

I agree that Her Gatt's bisexual oscillation suggests significant psycho-sexual tensions in her development as a writer, but these socio-sexual struggles are translations of an earlier psychological dynamic—the dynamic at the heart of her subjectivity that is the family. The novel recreates these tensions in its accounts of Her Gatt's romantic engagements which serve as palimpsests over familial patterns of relationship.³ Reading the romances, therefore, demands a reading of the partially obscured family dynamics that serve as a point of origin for relationship. However, "unearthing" the narrative of the family is no straightforward enterprise with a text that refuses the linear chronological model of narrative to account for the remembered family.

Her Gatt's act of "refusing the object status of the heterosexual paradigm," taking place as it does within the familial field of discourse, is an act of epic psychological proportions, in no way accomplished without ambivalence. As one literary reader has said, "[a]mbivalence, like so much else, including the words which may be used to express it, is learned from the parents who are directing its dual beam at the child" (Gunn, 74). Her Gatt occupies a sort of emotional nexus between her

³I refer of course to H.D.'s interest in the palimpsest as a metaphor for writing which only partially obscures that which has previously been erased.

parents, neither of whom can recognize her as a person with her own desires, and as a result she experiences herself as an object of their ambivalent desires, an object with tenuous hold on language.

Reading *HER*, and occupying a position that mirrors Her Gart's, the reader therefore finds her own relationship to language called into question. Both character and reader have to acquire a language with which to "speak out" of a matrix. Her Gart has to break her family's (especially her mother's) hold on her discourse and somehow speak (or in this case write) for herself; she has to *define* herself. This search for a "definition of Her" is mirrored by the reader who finds herself asking similar questions: who or what is Her? and who is telling us about her? When the reader comes to speak of a reading, she too must acquire, in this case, a critical language. Rather than separate from a mother, she must separate from a matrix of a text.

The first words of the novel introduce the polysemy of Her Gart's name which plunges us immediately into an account in which words do not hold to their referents; where language circles around to make an object of its speaker. Every time we read the name "Her Gart," for example, we are caught in the dizzying circular logic from which the character herself reels. It reads at least double, underlining the divided or split nature of her subjectivity. "Her" as a possessive pronoun, for example, would indicate that "Gart" belongs to her but *Gart* in this case is literally the "name of the father" with his "biological-mathematical definition of the universe" (*Her*, 6). And his name is etymologically similar to *garth* or "a piece of enclosed ground," which in this text encloses *her*. Rather than "Gart" belonging to her, Her is possessed by "Gart"; or rather she *was* thus pre-occupied until her failure at college when "science, as Carl Gart, as Bertrand Gart defined it, had eluded her perception" (*HER*, 6, my italics). Prior to her "failure," she was both inside and outside of these

names, possessor of and possessed by the language of her family in a condition similar to the one Kaja Silverman describes in her reading of Lévi-Strauss: "language, even more than kinship rules, ensures that all the members of a group inhabit the same psychic territory, and regiments the exchanges which take place between them" (Silverman, 180).⁴

When Her Gart fails to perceive science "as Carl Gart, as Bertrand Gart defined it" she finds herself in a zone where "her perception was ahead of her definition" (*HER*, 13). She is no longer in the "same psychic territory" as the rest of the family, but neither has she yet gained confidence or facility for her own definition.

Clutching out toward some definition of herself, she found that "I am Her Gart" didn't let her hold on. Her fingers slipped off; she was no longer anything. Gart, Gart, Gart and the Gart theorem of mathematical biological intention dropped out Hermione. She was not Gart, she was not Hermione, she was not anymore Her Gart, what was she? (4)

She is between terms as if in a zone prior to signification and the narrative of her experience is indicative of this polysemic terrain. For example, "the Gart theorem dropped out Hermione" can be read colloquially as an expulsion or withdrawal but it also suggests that Hermione is the end result of the theorem, the answer to the equation. Both readings make Hermione the object of the verb —the question asked is not *who* was she? but "what was she?"

Similarly, we read that Hermione had found college math "tenable until she came to conic sections and then Dr. Barton-Furness had failed her, failed her...they had all failed her" (6). The theorem was tenable but then she lost her hold, but this sentence also reads that "it" let go of her; that is, she is the object of someone else's failure, the subject who fails, and the failure itself. Most readers agree that Hermione

⁴This etymological reading of "Gart" indicates my own desire to hold onto something in the narrative's slippery language. While etymology might promise to account for the origin of words--their "formation and derivation," there remains much that is "untenable" in this novel's play with language.

is trying unsuccessfully to posit herself as "a subject of her own speech" (Benstock, 337), that her so-called dementia hinges on her experience of being spoken by language rather than speaking. As Luce Irigaray explains,

Spoken more than speaking, enunciated more than enunciating, the demented person is therefore no longer really an active subject of the enunciation. . . . He is only a possible mouthpiece for previously pronounced enunciations. (in Moi, 127)

Her Gart's strange utterances do indicate the power of the Gart family's "previously pronounced enunciations." The so-called *theorum* predetermines what is recognized as success or failure and, until it is somehow deconstructed, circumscribes Hermione's ability to think or speak in any other way.

The complex pronominal play of her name has inspired readers to focus on that endlessly repeated third person pronoun. Many critics decide that "Her" is a nickname for Hermione and leave it at that. (Friedman claims that "Hermione is her persona and 'Her' is her nickname as she images her emergence from breakdown. . ." [PR, 9].) Others address the problematic proper name which, as Deborah Kloepfer argues, underlines ". . . the awkwardness of all attempts to articulate the self" ("Flesh Made Word," 36). While critics have sometimes convincingly argued about Her Gart's conflict-bound subjectivity as it is manifested in the third person pronoun, no one has examined the complex of the "I" who speaks "I am Her," nor has there been much indication of difficulty in reading such an utterance. How does one read, for example, "She said, 'I am Hermione Gart,' but Her Gart was not that"(3)? *She* is not what the "I" says of herself. Who is speaking here? Who is Her? What is this vertigo about?⁵

⁵ L.S. Dembo in an essay called "H.D.: Imagiste and her Octopus Intelligence" reveals something of the vertigo or anxiety inspired by the collapse between "Her" and "I," while absolutely denying it. For example he writes, "Hermione Gart, to all appearances a fairly normal if willful young woman has an unseen virtually demented other-self called Her Gart" (212). Dembo also says that Hermione's "reasoning is. . . itself odd and suggests a dementia that goes beyond

These are the critical questions to be answered in any discussion of the text, yet this novel seems to encourage what Genette, in his discussion of narrative, calls the critical confusion "between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?*—or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*" (186). Critics of *HER* rarely distinguish between the narrator and Her Gart; some readers even call the novel's principal character "H.D." While many modernist texts by women have been subjected to the sort of criticism that focuses on "images of women" while bypassing textual dynamics, *HER* seems particularly attractive to the critics who seem determined to read it as *life* rather than as *text*. But rather than a failure of critical perspicuity, this critical preference for the "life" or biography over the text may, in this case, spring from the anxiety inspired by the novel itself. Reading for the "facts" of H.D.'s life is a way of avoiding the unsettling position that the narrative sets up for its reader, since *HER* reflects neither a stable fiction of a personality, nor a transparent autobiography.

We know from the experience of other literary texts that, as Genette claims,

... the narrator almost always "knows" more than the hero, even if he himself [sic] is the hero and therefore for the narrator focalization through the hero is a restriction of field just as artificial in the first person as in the third. (194)

the senses; *yet that complication need not trouble us here*" (213, italics mine). The language of this essay keeps repeating "dementia," "odd reasoning" and "psychic terrors" which Dembo insists are untroubling. His confession, "I am not troubled by the fact that Hermione . . . shows clearly pathological leanings"(214), reveals a sort of denial which can only read as its opposite after a few repetitions. He is evidently troubled by the "description and narration [which] have a bizarre quality," but Dembo never looks at the narration, exploring instead the play between what Hermione never says but wants to say:

...meanwhile the aesthetic possibilities of tentacles or peony petals or whatever other psychic terrors or joys were experienced by an inner non-self adrift in nature and society, remained unincarnate and unformulated by the written word and were lost."(212)

By failing to distinguish between the character and the narrator, he thus indicates his own struggle with the "unincarnate and unformulated."

In this text, however, rather than "restriction of field," the mobility or permeability between "I" and "Her" blurs the distinction between the first person and the third, and blurs character and narrator together. For example, we read on the text's first page that "...Her Gart was then no prophet. She could not predict later common usage of uncommon syllogisms; 'failure complex,' 'compensation reflex'. . ." (3). This third person account of the third person speaks from an implied present which is later than the present of Her Gart. So, chronologically, it appears we are reading a retrospective account from a position of later insight, a narrative of "then" from a still unspecified "now," except that the present of narration frequently collapses into the moment being narrated. From a third person position the narrative slips into the first; from the moment of retrospect it collapses into the experience of the thing remembered:

Her Gart stood. Her mind still trod its round. I am Her Gart, my name is Her Gart. I am Hermione Gart. I am going round and round in circles. Her Gart went on. Her feet went on. . . . Her Gart. I am Her Gart. Nothing held her, she was nothing to this thing: I am Hermione Gart, a failure. (4)

The rapid shift from "Her" to "I" and back out again to "Her" denies the space between subject and object, and locates the two positions as if they were identical. The narrative manoeuvre which makes "I" refer to "her" implies thus that neither of the pronouns refer to persons or subjects. Beneveniste's discussion of pronouns explicates this operation:

. . . the third person. . . does not refer to a person because it refers to an object located outside direct address. But it exists and is characterized only by its opposition to the person *I* of the speaker who, in uttering it, situates it as "non-person." (229)

In other words, in this narrative there is no opposition between "the person *I* of the speaker" and the "object located outside direct address." The narrative I/eye turns the

subject into an object of discourse so that the speaking subject seems external to itself: "I am Her" thus situates "I" as a "non-person."

By "person" I am not referring to a romantic individualism but to a capacity for language with which one might signify one's own person. As Beneveniste argues, "it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality. . . . The 'subjectivity' we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as 'subject'" (224). Her Gart, as her name itself suggests, cannot speak her mind as an "active agent of the enunciation," because she has not yet found a way to speak in her own (i.e. first) person. This painful situation arises because Hermione's "I" is the object of her family's discourse.

Although he is not referring explicitly to literary texts, Daniel Gunn's discussion of the suffering of children analysands can also describe Her Gart's scenario. In his discussion of psychoanalysis and fiction, Gunn writes:

. . . there are two major and interconnecting areas of difficulty which link the various sufferings. These are the body, and the "I" through which the body attempts to gain access to language and desire; both of which come into existence, for better or for worse, within the context of certain institutions (of which the most important is usually the family).
(76)

In H.D.'s novel, the Gart family tenaciously contains "the body, and the 'I' through which the body attempts to gain access to language and desire."

Mother's Silence, Father's Science

In Hermione's experience, neither of her parents can recognize "Her." Neither her father nor her mother provide the adequate "mirrors" for her that would ensure her developmental passage into what Lacan and others refer to as the Symbolic Order.

That is,

The "I" emerges from and is in hazardous relation to the alienating identification with a totalised image of the self (or ideal-ego) perceived as it were in the mirror. The "I" allows an identification with an image or "person" which, in the present context, the subject might at a later stage be said to "possess." (Gunn, 78)

This "identification with an image or 'person'" is what creates the self (i.e. the one who says 'I'); one's identity is thus intertwined with and dependant on early relationships with others, or as one psychoanalyst puts it, "in order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for another" (Benjamin, 53). Her Gart's struggle with her subjectivity—with her capacity to represent herself as subject—springs, to a large extent, from her parents', especially her mother's, inability to recognize her as her own person.

When, for example, Eugenia addresses her daughter, she stresses her possessive claim by calling her "*Her-mi-on-ie*." We read:

"Oh Hermione. Oh my dear, *dear* child." Eugenia saying my dear, dear child didn't mean that she was dear, didn't mean that she was a child.
(77)

While Eugenia might seem tender here, there is an excessiveness to her concern. In exchanges between mother and daughter elsewhere in the text, Her's mother also

concerns herself with what Hermione eats and with the suitability of her daughter's clothes. Hermione even acts as if she knows herself only within the axis of her mother's judgement. She anticipates criticism, as can be seen at a moment when—

[t]he wind made only the slightest little flutter of the ribbon on her undergarment; things stuck fast, she remembered she had on only one straight one-piece undergarment, the dress was almost thick enough not to see through.

She felt now she mustn't get up, Eugenia would be sure to see she had no petticoat on. She felt too the whole linen one-piece dress would bear imprint of her hot sides, her back...her legs stretched under the one-piece summer garment. . . . (29)

Hermione seems to be an extension of her mother, at least in so far as the preoedipal issue of maternal control of the daughter's body extends here long past adolescence. It is "her hot sides, her back...her legs" which she feels she must hide from the scrutiny of Eugenia. Maternal concern here keeps Her from moving—literally and emotionally, since excessive tenderness can keep a child in a kind of "emotional slavery to the mother, hemmed in by potential guilt" (Chodorow,135).

While "emotional slavery" might seem like strong language, it is an accurate account of the subtly controlled terrain that is the bond between mother and daughter.

When Eugenia speaks, it

brought back odd things, things that had all along been half-accepted and so the more difficult to reject openly. When Eugenia said "You said he was in Venice" in that tone of accusation, Hermione knew she must formulate George Lowndes. It was going to be very difficult to formulate George Lowndes, to concentrate enough to get an image of George. . . .

. . . . She perceived Eugenia glaring. Her said, "Just why do you hate George so?" "I don't hate, as you put it, George Lowndes. Have I ever *not* made any of your friends welcome," made things again incalculable, though Eugenia, to be fair, was no worse than other people. (44)

Eugenia's "tone of accusation" makes it difficult for Hermione to "concentrate long enough to get an image"; Eugenia makes things "incalculable." Considering that this conflict between the two women occurs when Eugenia disapproves of George on the

basis of gossip from her "university ladies," it appears that Eugenia wishes to control her daughter's association because of how it will reflect on *her* social image, while Hermione is the one who tries "to be fair" (i.e. adult or mothering) about this situation.

In developmental accounts, it is axiomatic that children of both sexes begin their lives as matrisexual. Nancy Chodorow's work in *The Reproduction of Mothering* lays out a detailed survey of this early matrisexuality's implications for daughters and how it is "love for the mother that causes the gravest difficulty for the little girl" (124). "The gravest difficulty" to which Chodorow here refers involves the double-bind situation for a daughter, a situation that arises from her attachment to a person who never encourages differentiation. Because women are mothers in social conditions with which we are by now familiar, they experience their sons as separate from them while their daughters seem to be continuous extensions of themselves. As Chodorow argues,

. . . the mother does not recognize or denies the existence of the daughter as a separate person, and the daughter herself then comes not to recognize, or to have difficulty recognizing, herself as a separate person. (103)

The daughter who loves a mother who in turn denies her finds herself in a difficult position—a position like Hermione's—especially when the mother is also uncertain about her own subjectivity.

Eugenia Gart lives in the shadow of her husband and most readers find her inconspicuous in the narrative's concerns as well.⁶ She is, after all,

⁶Susan Stanford Friedman's analysis is, in many ways, a paradigmatic approach. She calls the mother in *HER* a victim of masculine culture, "insecure and self-denigrating about her own considerable 'gifts'" (*PR*, 140). Friedman also refers to Eugenia as a "soft maternal figure...who is bound tightly by social convention"(42). While I agree that Eugenia is bound by Victorian conventions of femininity, I think that in some ways, Friedman is doing what Hermione does:

...rooted and mossed over and not to be disrupted. If Eugenia Gart pulled up her mossgrown fibres, Pennsylvania itself would ache like a jaw from which has been extracted a somewhat cumbrous molar. (9)

For Hermione, however, her mother's "mossgrown fibres" and conflation with Pennsylvania itself make the process of separating from her rather difficult. How does one separate from a person who is also the state? This state of Pennsylvania/Eugenia is characterized by its unspeakability; it is known by intuition or by association with painting or music or household objects—"the sort of thing that would suffocate her with sentiment; an owl her grandfather had kept in an old loft, a toad her brother had found unearthed near a wellhead in the process of being mortared. . . . She remembered the sort of thing that would mean to her—Pennsylvania" (9). Through metonymy these things "mean to her—Pennsylvania," which is itself a metonym for what "suffocate[s] her with sentiment"—Eugenia. The metonymic chain probably appears for the same reasons it would arise in a dream; like condensation and displacement which allows repressed material to partially manifest itself, metonymy has at its disposal "tricks and detours that, according to Lacan, allow it to 'get around the obstacles of social censorship'" (Gallop, *RL*, 129). As long as Hermione is subject to, in this case the censorship of her mother's world-view, she cannot speak of this "state": she is contained by it. In fact, Hermione's identification with trees and dryads can be read as her experience of being enclosed by her mother's psyche.

"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" (5). She switches the grammatical subject of her utterances so

by calling the mother a victim who nonetheless has "considerable gifts," she need not examine the consequences of Eugenia's behaviour when it is directed toward the daughter.

that "trees" and "people" are equivalent with each other, like reciprocal, and in her case, ineluctable containers.

Pennsylvania had her. She would never get away from Pennsylvania. She knew, standing now on the woodpath, that she would never get away from Pennsylvania. . . . (5)

Her father's "biological-mathematical definition of the universe"(6) has failed to account for her perceptions of herself and because "it hadn't occurred to her to put the thing in writing," she is left with this:

concentric gelatinous substance that was her perception of trees grown closer, grown near and near, grown translucent like celluloid. The circles of trees were tree-green; she wanted the inner lining of an Atlantic breaker. (7)

These are images of maternal enclosure, and although Hermione does not seem conscious that it is her mother she seeks to leave, her feelings about the forest serve as a displaced account of her maternal bond. She is as ambivalent about the Pennsylvanian landscape as she is about her mother.

She wanted to see through reaches of sea-wall, push on through transparencies. She wanted to get away yet to be merged with the thing she so loathed. . . . (7)

Part of her predicament has to do with the elusiveness of her experience. She considers "the inner lining of an Atlantic breaker," "gelatinous substance," and "transparencies," but her inability to fix a particular image or sign suggests she has not quite differentiated herself. Julia Kristeva's notion of the "thetic subject" is a useful way to account for this problematic separation, because it argues that the process of becoming a speaking subject who can posit herself in her utterances involves "the identification of subject and its distinction from objects, and the establishment of a

sign system" (from translator's glossary in *DIL*). Hermione's "sign system" is slippery; she finds that words do not hold to their referents, partly because she does not always distinguish herself as a separate point of reference. This is not necessarily a pathology peculiar to Her Gart; the mother/daughter dyad is fraught with this sort of incomplete differentiation. Luce Irigaray, for example, argues that it is virtually impossible in our present psychic economy to posit oneself as both subject and daughter.

There is no possibility whatsoever, within the current logic of sociocultural operations, for a daughter to situate herself with respect to her mother: because, strictly speaking, they make neither one nor two, neither has a name, meaning, sex of her own, neither can be "identified" with respect to the other. A problem Freud dismisses "serenely" by saying that the daughter has to turn away from her mother, has to "hate" her, in order to enter into the Oedipus complex. (*This Sex*, 143)

Chodorow explores this Oedipal "turn away from her mother" in the context of the daughter's recognition that the gender identity she shares with her mother "does not work to her advantage in forming a bond with her mother, does not make her mother love her more" (125). The daughter develops (or tries to develop) a relationship with her father, sometimes even wishes to be a boy, because of "the wounded love . . . for the mother, whom she wants for herself just as much as a boy does" (125). When it becomes evident that she cannot be "identified with respect to the other," Hermione turns to Carl Gart who seems to represent not only freedom from the dependence and merging she experiences with her mother but also a capacity for the language and worldly accomplishment which attract her mother's attention. Her turn to her father's "biological mathematical definition of the universe" is both an expression of love for her mother (i.e. if she could be "like" Carl Gart, her mother might love her better), and an attack against her. It is no accident that the scene with Carl Gart follows a heated conflict with Eugenia. She seeks out the man who has "inner vision," hoping to be acknowledged by him. But in spite of his "vision" and

work with microscopes, he cannot quite focus on the girl who is more gifted than his son.⁷

When Hermione seeks her father, she finds him studying "a bit of alga" with his microscope:

The thing, she knew, would look odd, unholy in its beauty under the microscope that one thin hand was screwing, adjusting to his vision. Carl Gart pulled away his eye from the microscope lens and with an effort jolted himself back, with a jolt brought himself back to—"Eugenia." "I'm not Eugenia, I'm Hermione." (99)

She knows about his way of looking, how the alga "would look odd, unholy in its beauty," but he is unable to see her— he cannot even distinguish her from his wife. He brings his mind around "by a superhuman effort to readjustment to the thing before him" (99). His own daughter is a "thing before him," a thing with "odd, unholy eyes"; an object which the narrative describes in terms similar to the object of his scientific interest. However, all that he can say to her is "You're—you're thin, Hermione"(99).

Hermione has come to her father for recognition after she has struggled unsuccessfully (she believes) for "an image no matter how fluid, how inchoate" (5) in the subterranean realm of her mother. She identifies a part of herself with him, even if it manifests only in their physical similarity, and her response indicates her desire to be recognized as like him: "I'm not any more thin than I always am, father. I'm no more thin than you are. *We are thin, father*" (my emphasis, 99). In view of the fact that the father here represents the world or a way into the world, a way of ascertaining the emotional constellations of self and other, this exchange between Her Gart and Carl Gart reveals how the father's failure to acknowledge his daughter's subjectivity

⁷Here is another interesting reworking of "the life." H.D.'s father was an astronomer, a man who worked with telescopes which she here brings into close focus.

abandons her to her mother. Rather than functioning as a third party intervenor, Carl Gart's absence makes the so-called Oedipal turn away from the mother unlikely, if not impossible to accomplish.

His mind hovered like a desert eagle before his dual beauties. Like a desert hawk that sees here (this side) a skeleton of a dead horse and there (that side) some low flying swooping sister eagle, Carl Gart wavered. The mind of Carl Gart wavered before the vision in the lens beside him and this other vision...Hermione sitting here beside him, sister eagle, brother eagle, twin eagle mind, Hermione. Bertrand was patient but uninspired. Hermione has some odd way of seeing...she had failed him. (100)

As the images of soaring eagles attest, Hermione idealizes her father. She creates an ideal image of his mind's capacity for independent thought which indicates *her* desires for such autonomy and recognition by the father. However, his imagination fails him. Carl Gart seems on the threshold of recognizing her "twin eagle mind" parallel to his own—on the threshold of acknowledging her. But then he compares her to his son who is "patient but uninspired." This suggests by implication that he recognizes how Hermione's "odd way of seeing" *is* inspired—he simply cannot imagine or, perhaps, cannot tolerate a "twin eagle mind" in the form of a girl. When Carl Gart decides that she had failed him, it is actually he who fails her.

Even though Bertrand is a mediocre thinker compared to Hermione, the father chooses to recognize himself in his son. Jessica Benjamin finds such a choice quite common in familial relations. She argues,

the father's withdrawal pushes the girl back to her mother; the consequent turning inward of her aspirations for independence and her anger at non-recognition explain her depressive response Thus . . . girls are confronted more directly by the difficulty of separating from mother and their own helplessness. Unprotected by the phallic sign of gender difference, unsupported by an alternate relationship, they relinquish their entitlement to desire. (109)

The man whom Hermione calls great, "as abstract and as beautiful as white bones bleached in sunlight" (100), is unable to imagine his daughter's desires for independence and agency. He withdraws from her and then ascribes his failure to *her* in a moment when he calls her "daughter," as if to remind himself that she has failed at not being his son, at not being something he can recognize—a subject *like him*.

"I mean—what were you saying daughter?" He called her daughter like a Middle West farmer, like someone out of the Old Testament, like God saying *daughter I say unto you arise*. He called her daughter out of some old, old volume...she left the room...defeated. (100)

This is a significant exchange between father and daughter because the daughter comes to discover her gender as a defeat. Benjamin claims that for children of both genders, the father is symbolically "the subject of desire in whom one recognizes oneself. Separation-individuation thus becomes a gender issue and recognition and independence are now organized within the frame of gender" (104). Because "daughter" is not the valued position in the Gart family, neither parent enables Her to recognize herself as a desiring subject. She is caught between them:

In Hermione Gart, the two never fused and blended, she was both moss-grown, inbedded 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. (9)

She can neither leave nor stay without either breaking or suffocating.

Of course she turns to George Lowndes to "correlate for her, life here, there. She wanted George to define and make definable a mirage, a reflection of some lost incarnation, a wood maniac, a tree demon, a neuropathic dendrophil" (63). But George has his own language for the "forest primeval" and cannot see her any better than her father does—cannot see Her for the trees. His way of "blotting her out" is

most explicit for its placement following the scene where her father fails Her. That is, after "she left the room...defeated" (100),

Mechanically she went to the telephone. Mechanically she rang up the operator, mechanically she said hello, hello, hello. Voice far and far at the end of a long wire, somewhere far and far a voice would speak to her, the voice would say, "You are one damn fool Bellissima, you can't let me down this way" and she would say "But you must never come again George" and George would know she meant it (100)

The contiguous placement of this reflection on George next to her "defeat" by Carl Gart suggests by association that Her has transcribed her desire for paternal recognition onto George, and with as much chance for success in the operation. She seems to believe both that George is "the one thing to save her from this dehumanizing process" (101), and that he is implicated in it.

Hermione's narrative uses poetic language to describe her predicament:

She did not know what it was she wanted.

She wanted the Point. She wanted to get to Point Pleasant. She wanted the canoe, she wanted a mythical wolfhound. 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. Trees were suffocation. (7-8)

The thing that is elusive also "walled one in." She wants to get away and to merge, then claims she does not know what she wants. Her gender defeats her in relationship to her father, and with her mother she has not yet found a way to assert her difference. Eugenia's subjective borders are so blurred with Hermione's that "neither can be 'identified' with respect to the other" (in Irigaray's terms), and this scenario is what paradoxically both eludes her and suffocates her. Until she can somehow speak her way out, Hermione can only stammer and stutter and remain loyal to a maternal world she cannot quite perceive.

Her Gart had no a,b,c Esperanto of world expression. She was not of the world, she was not in the world, unhappily she was not out of the world. She wanted to be out, get out but even as her mind filmed over with grey-gelatinous substance of some sort of nonthinking, of some sort of nonbeing or of nonentity, she felt psychic claw unsheathe somewhere, she felt herself clutch toward something that had no name yet. (8)

For Hermione (and, I suspect, for many women), having been refused paternal authority, the principle struggle for her own voice returns her to a maternal terrain. She is threatened at all points with "some sort of nonthinking," or with an undifferentiated blur from which she will never be able to signify herself as "I." "I am Her," is an articulation of this ongoing pre-oedipal fantasy of fusion. I devote the next chapter to this struggle between mother and daughter, but before I set into that, I must briefly return to what I only fleetingly mentioned above: the narrative of Her Gart's experience.

I, You, and Her

A sketch of Hermione's problematic subjectivity as a result of her gendered position between her parents is basically an analysis of the story as I see it or of the "contents" of the narrative which I have had to distinguish from its form, simply in order to speak about it. The form of the narrative is, however, inseparable from the thing narrated: it constructs the reader's knowledge of the "story" and, as Genette argues, is the only aspect of fiction "directly available to textual analysis"(7).⁸ It is

⁸Jonathan Culler's introduction to *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* summarizes the distinctions between *story*, *narrative* and *narrating*. *Story* is "the signified or narrative content"; *narrative* in contrast is the "signifier,

significant that readers have so easily assumed a transparent connection between the narrative "I" and the biographical H.D.—that no one has discussed H.D.'s narrative "I" in her fiction. This ignoring of the narrator in *HER* has particularly suggestive implications for the text's exploration of issues of individuation and merging.

Teresa de Lauretis, in her discussion of gender and narrative, describes how most theories of narrative are co-extensive with paradigms of male sexuality—Oedipus being the model for the hero or mythical subject (113). This oedipal model makes for narratives which "endlessly reconstruct . . . a two character drama in which the human person creates and re-creates *himself* out of an abstract or purely symbolic other—the womb, the earth, the grave, the woman The drama has the movement of a passage, a crossing, an actively experienced transformation of the human being into—man" (121). All narrative is therefore overlaid with a so-called "Oedipal logic," a logic de Lauretis describes as "the inner necessity or drive of the drama—its 'sense of an ending' inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time" (125). H.D.'s narrative defies this "Oedipal logic," both by its content and its articulation of that content, because the human person here is a young woman. If the movement across the space of an "abstract or symbolic other" results in the becoming of a man, what kind of transition does a female subject undergo? If the necessity of the drama is contingent upon "the memory of loss and the recapturing of time," the transformation of a person seems next to impossible when that person seems not only to have *not* "lost" her mother, but also to herself occupy that space of the "symbolic object"—who is "TREE exactly" (73).

I should stress this condition in which Her Gart *seems* to be still fused with her mother, because it functions as a fantasy with which she protects herself from the

statement, discourse or narrative text itself"; while *narrating* refers to "the producing narrative action and by extension the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (27).

knowledge of her actual maternal loss or abandonment. She perceives her mother as a state for both maternal and daughterly minds—a state unpenetrated by time or the outside world. This is suggested by the corner of Eugenia's garden which is set aside to the memory of her own mother, where a ribbon rose bush grows which "hadn't ever been touched by anyone, a sort of sacrament, preserving a tiny figure with white cap and apron, snipping with a disproportionate pair of garden scissors" (20). By preserving the garden's sacramental, rather enchanted atmosphere, Eugenia is able to preserve a continuity with her own mother; able to preserve the illusion of a bond which "hadn't ever been touched by anyone." She represses her own knowledge of maternal loss, so that her daughter thus enters a chain of mothers and daughters continuous with one another.

Hermione seems most aware of this matrilineal enchantment when she tries to explain to her sister-in-law these "things which had no palpable explanation" (21).

It was impossible to begin to explain to Minnie. Certain days of the year were set aside, inexorable Chinese-like fidelity of Eugenia. Hermione could not keep track of what she called in her childhood Eugenia's "still days." How could, then, poor Minnie? . . . It was so impossible to rise from ashes, to drag out things that she herself didn't dare face. Hermione must be loyal to Eugenia. (21)

Hermione's loyalty to Eugenia here mirrors Eugenia's "inexorable, Chinese-like fidelity." In this maternal realm, both of the women experience an imperative regarding each other's loyalty to "things that she herself dare not face." Eugenia's "still days" are an *inexorable* ritual, while Hermione, for her part, "*must* be loyal to Eugenia." The tenacity of this imaginary maternal bond reads somewhat like what Julia Kristeva calls "the connivance of the young girl with her mother, her greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function" (KR, 205). Kristeva describes how a son may later rediscover or re-establish

maternal contact through his future heterosexual relationships, but a daughter, by contrast, can never re-contact her mother

—except by becoming a mother herself, through a child or through a homosexuality which is in itself extremely difficult and judged as suspect by society; and what is more, why and in the name of what dubious symbolic benefit would she want to make this detachment so as to conform to a symbolic system which remains foreign to her? (*KR*, 204)

This telling question about the "dubious symbolic benefit" of detachment seems to haunt the novel's readers as much as it unsettles Hermione. Because the text focalizes primarily through Hermione, readers are given her frequently hysterical view of a vertiginous world. This view is a style of focalization Gerard Genette calls "vision with" a character so that the character is seen,

not in his innerness . . . but . . . in the image he develops of others, and to some extent through that image. In sum, we apprehend him as we apprehend ourselves in our immediate awareness of things, our attitudes with respect to what surrounds us—what surrounds us and is not within us. (193)

Hermione's "immediate awareness of things" does not always differentiate between "what surrounds [her] and is not within [her]," as can be seen when she insists, for example, "I am in the word TREE. I am TREE exactly" (73). It is Hermione's stammering and stuttering knowledge of herself in her world that thus orients, or in this case disorients, the reader. And this identification with Hermione's disorientation makes for a reader's recognition of her or his vulnerability within the symbolic register of language; that is, one comes to recognize one's own tenuous hold on this language *or* one forecloses this recognition by maintaining the illusion of an unbroken maternal bond.

Although Julia Kristeva insists that we challenge the "myth of the archaic mother"—that we reconsider "the belief in a good and pure substance . . . the belief in

the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total englobing mother with no frustration, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words)" (KR, 205), many critics who employ Kristevan and other psychoanalytic notions do not consider maternal abandonment in H.D.'s *HER*. In her important study of H.D.'s oeuvre, Susan Stanford Friedman, for example, claims that through imagination, Hermione makes her mother into an all-powerful Demeter, "image of the whole mother" (PR, 142), but she then focuses on the Demeter figure rather than on Hermione's imaginative construction.⁹ The scene in the novel to which Friedman refers certainly plays with the figure of Demeter, but there are some crucial features which Friedman overlooks.

First, the "image of the whole mother" is introduced by Eugenia's comment, "I'm glad that you can eat, Hermione. This air is stupefying" (88), which is one of her many emotionally laden remarks concerning food. While I disagree with one critic who argues that Hermione "borders on anorexia throughout the novel" (Kloepfer, "Flesh Made Word," 38), I think she is tapping a root regarding the novel's attention to ongoing struggles over Hermione's body. (Kloepfer makes an interesting conflation with this remark about Hermione's "anorexia," because Fayne is actually the one who never eats). Hermione anticipates and receives Eugenia's criticism of her clothes and the few times Eugenia speaks willfully have to do with either Hermione's food intake (eg. "I sometimes think you drink too much coffee. . . . I think it would be better if you *ate* more, didn't pick at dry toast and really *ate* something. I think it's too much coffee" [122]), or material condition (i.e. her clothes, her financial prospects and social reputation with Eugenia's circle should she marry George Lowndes). These elements of "anxiety, intense and exclusive attachment, orality and food, maternal

⁹In her reading of H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, Friedman speaks of Hermione, the daughter abandoned by Helen, but does not recall the significance of the abandoned daughter when discussing the novel's heroine of the same name.

control of the daughter's body, [and a form of] primary identification" are the same elements referred to in Chorodow's argument that certain aspects of the mother/daughter pre-oedipal relationship "are maintained and prolonged in both maternal and filial psyche" (109-10). Eugenia Gart is a "whole mother" only to the extent she fuses her own identity with her daughter; she therefore "shushes" Hermione from speaking her own mind about something she (the mother) would not think of saying: ¹⁰

Mandy was standing with them. "Mandy's different..." "Sh-sssh..." Mandy (exquisite bronze) was a brazier burning in that bleak room. Mandy was bronze like a brazier (they—Hermione, Eugenia—were bottle-green) but Hermione couldn't say it. Eugenia was shushing at Hermione, not wanting her to say it. I can't say Mandy is a bronze. I can't say Mandy looks like Etruscan bronze dredged from the mid-Ionian with colour flashing against her polished bronze...I won't say Mandy is like a bronze giving out iridescence. . . . I won't say that. I must say, "What Mandy— not more hot cakes?" (88)

Hermione seems to accept their mutual bond of reciprocal identification. Identified with her mother, Hermione feels they are "bottle green" with "grey green underwater features," but this blurriness between them is hardly a moment of plenitude as they sit together in this "bleak room." And she agrees to her mother's injunction against speech, "I can't say . . . I won't say . . . I must say . . ." so that, if not in fact, at least in a powerful fantasy, the mother/daughter fusion is "maintained and prolonged in both maternal and filial psyche." They *are* already blurred together, and there is something distorted, underwater and "bottle green" about them, even before this storm flings them into "profound intimacy like shipwrecked mariners after the heavy sweep of waves has numbed them past consciousness of former quarrels, in the tiny morning room" (88).

¹⁰By now the feminine third person pronoun becomes obviously problematic in differentiating between mother and daughter.

Once they are "numbed past consciousness of former quarrels," they each draw away from each other and "forget themselves." It is only once "Eugenia had forgotten Hermione" that she begins to speak about her daughter's birth:

Eugenia forgetting herself spoke to herself. "Your father was *afraid* (the flood the year before had cracked Bolton's bridge) that the doctor wouldn't help us." Eugenia was speaking from somewhere outside herself, beyond the window, slashed with its hectic vermilion leaf-flash, fins of tropic sea fish, seen through tidewave of tidal waters. Eugenia had forgotten Hermione. "It was such a funny *time* to have a baby. I don't know why but it seemed a funny *time* to have a baby. It seems odd having a baby (I don't know why) by daylight. . . ." (89)

That is, Eugenia is speaking to *herself* when she addresses Hermione; Hermione is not an other to her mother. This attempt to articulate for herself her experience of birth involves repetitions and varying intonations of colloquial or conventional language that she seems to find inadequate. She repeats, "I don't know why," "to have a baby," and "it seems odd to have a baby" which, while referring to the "time" she had of Hermione's birth, also suggests something of her own ambivalence about that birth. "It was all over in a few hours...it was so funny. It was all over in a few hours. It was so odd. I had you in the morning" (89). It is the narrator who makes the claim for the rhythmic incantatory quality of these phrases that have "more power than textbooks, than geometry, than all of Carl Gart and brilliant 'Bertie Gart' as people called him" (89).

Deborah Kloepfer, whose work on the sexual and textual tensions within the mother/daughter bond has been invaluable to my own, describes this scene between Eugenia and Hermione as a birth passage which causes Hermione to recognize the power of this "semiotic register" invoked in her mother's language about birth. She claims this "invocation" gives Hermione access to a "maternal hieroglyph" or what she refers to as "the mother's cartouche" (*UM*, 93), but does not mention that the power of Eugenia's words are experienced when she is *oblivious* to the presence of her

daughter. I would suggest that it is precisely the mother's obliviousness or absence which causes her daughter to idealize her words—to invoke an omnipotent maternal presence in place of the woman who cannot "see" her daughter. Kloepfer herself performs something like the daughter's acclamation of maternal power here because she reads the narrator as Her Gart.

The text's references to maternal power in the person of Demeter also speak to Eugenia's desire for a mother:

"Then the doctor came. But she was such a dear nurse, so much better than the doctor, she was like a mother to me..."

Demeter (such a dear nurse) lifting the tired shoulders of a young Eugenia had driven the wind back, back...the house was sitting on its haunches. The house sunk down on its haunches. The house took a deep breath settled down, decided to settle down for another re-incarnation. It was Eugenia who had saved it. (89-90)

When Eugenia speaks of giving birth to her daughter, she describes her own longing for a mother. Hermione's relationship to her mother thus involves a kind of doubled longing. Hermione's mother is absent to her because of Eugenia's mother's absence to her. Hermione is thus the literal embodiment of her mother's own ambivalent desires for maternal protection.

This maternal ambivalence is particularly important in view of the fact that Eugenia's first daughter, a girl prior to Hermione, was stillborn.¹¹ One could therefore read Eugenia's repeated insistence at the oddness of having a baby "in the morning" as an indication of her own unresolved *mourning*. Hermione certainly feels the weight of this mourning when she tries to explain her mother's garden to Minnie—

"...she lost...she lost a baby." It was impossible to explain to Minnie that the baby was one between herself and Bertrand, a girl, stillborn. "I

¹¹H.D. did have a half sister who was stillborn; Professor Doolittle's first wife died during the child's birth (Guest, 14). H.D.'s fictional conflation of her father's first wife into her own mother may suggest an unresolved mourning regarding this birth that brought death.

didn't know there was another baby." There wasn't exactly. I mean it didn't breathe...it wasn't buried with the others." The whole thing was too horrible. How explain to Minnie a sentiment about a stillborn child?

. . . . Shadow crept up, heavy metal toward the lawn step. If the shadow crept further it would cut Her down, a black blade of black-scythe, the little old lady haunted that corner of the garden. (21)

Because of Eugenia's unresolved mourning, Hermione is obliged to "become and remain the object which fills this lack, . . . [which] cauterizes the scar of the unsaid" (Gunn, 86).¹² The mother's need, from delivery, for Hermione to fill in for "a sentiment about a stillborn child" brings about the sort of complex and overdetermined psychological bond Chodorow describes when she says that ambivalence or anxiety "leaves mother and daughter convinced that any separation between them will bring disaster to both" (135). If Hermione is the embodiment (literally, from birth) of her mother's desires, how can Eugenia let her daughter go?

Critics tend to read the textualization of this life and death struggle as basically a friendly debate over conventional feminine roles. But when Eugenia says "Hermione this will *kill* me" (95) or emphasizes the girl's name as "Her-mi-on-ie" (77), she is speaking a psychic fact that is disturbing to consider, especially when readers agree to the daughterly subjectivity posited by the narrative—agree to think

¹²Gunn is here discussing the psychoanalytic work of Maud Mannoni. He describes how an infant is perhaps inevitably objectivized, since a child is "spoken within the words and desires of its parents when it comes into the world, and in fact its place has long been prepared by the words and expectations which the approach of the baby has provoked. But if the parents, because of some failed love or uncompleted mourning or unarticulated family instability on their part (because of their own problematic relation to the Symbolic), are experiencing intense frustration and lack in their own lives, they may allow or even oblige the infant to become (and remain) the object which fills this lack, satisfies the frustration, and cauterizes the scar of the unsaid" (86).

well of or protect Eugenia. For this discussion it is therefore crucial to distinguish that it is the narrator who speaks of Demeter.¹³

* * *

The collapse of the narrative "I" into Hermione's eye seems to invite readers to conflate the narrator with the character. In this way, H.D.'s narrator functions in a manner similar to the operation of a camera as it constructs a cinematographic narrative.¹⁴ If, as Kaja Silverman claims, the experience of the film's viewer is derived "... from the imperative that the camera deny its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze" (204), the experience of H.D.'s readers is similar to a film viewer's to the extent we agree to the illusion that "what is shown" is independent of "any coercive gaze." The narrator seems to be Her Gart because of narrative manoeuvres similar to the classic "shot/reverse shot" in film-making.¹⁵ That is, what is hidden from knowledge is the way our knowledge is constructed or coerced. The analogy is useful when one considers the way the narrator in this novel covers over the fact of third-person narrative by collapsing or "zooming" into the "I" of Her Gart.

¹³Kloepfer, in spite of her important exploration of the trope of the absent mother, accepts the narrator's account as Hermione's and therefore occludes the narrative construction of the reader as daughter.

¹⁴In 1926, the year prior to her completion of this novel, H.D. was very interested in film, both as an actor and a reviewer; H.D. even signed her screen name, Helga Doorn, to the manuscript of *HER*.

¹⁵Silverman describes the shot/reverse shot as "the cinematic set in which the second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken. . . . This stricture means that the camera always leaves unexplored the other 180 degrees of an implicit circle--the half of the circle which it in fact occupies" (Silverman, 201)

This third person narrator frames our gaze for most of the novel's cinematographic presentations of character. For example,

She sat up in her bed, her two arms encircling her bare knees. She pulled her thin garment down tight about her bare knees and sat up in pulse-pulse of lightning like some carved heavy marble, suppliant praying with head bent down on swathed marble knees. Knees in the white pulse-pulse of heat lightning above the sharp edges of the black woods, made her white, a marble, seated in anguish, a young suppliant with knees covered with marble folds of cloth, of carved stone. . . . she sat, an image on a head stone in the pulse of heady lightning. (86)

Like the viewer of a film, the reader might well ask whose perspective orients this description of supplication (for what?) by an "image on a head stone." Why "seated in anguish?" What anguish? If this were a film, the viewing subject, ". . . unable to sustain for long its belief in the autonomy of the cinematic image, [would demand] to know whose gaze controls what it sees" (Silverman, 202). The shot/reverse shot would be the camera's way (i.e. the filmmaker's way) of covering over its controlling role.

This is basically what the narrative accomplishes as well. In the next paragraph we read,

Turned to stone, turned to stone...who was turned to stone for something? I will be turned to stone but buzz-zz...zzz...saved her from that predicament. . . . She could visualize the mosquito flown off again somewhere. . . . (86)

From the long imagistic account of her as stone, marble, "noble suppliant marble head on bare marble" the narrator closes in to the "I" who fears turning into stone, who is perhaps imagining how she looks from the outside. This seeing herself being seen could be an indication of her alienation from herself, in the way that John Berger claims is common to women who watch themselves being watched.¹⁶ At any rate, my

¹⁶In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger argues that a woman embodies "the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of

speculation about her thoughts indicates how the narrative has an effect very much like a film's in which,

[a]s a result, the level of enunciation remains veiled from the viewing subject's scrutiny, which is entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction; the subject of the speech seems to be the speaking subject, or to state it differently, the gaze which directs our look seems to belong to a fictional character rather than to the camera. (Silverman, 202)

The narrator of this text is, like a film's "level of enunciation . . . entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction"; it seems to be Her Gart who directs our readerly "gaze." This obscuring or absorption of the narrator has important implications for the reader who is thereby drawn into the fiction. In fact, by covering over or "veiling" the level of speech here, the narrative re-enacts a process which is at the foundation of subjectivity itself.

To sustain the cinematographic analogy, one could argue that the description of Her Gart "like some carved heavy marble, suppliant praying with head bent down on swathed marble knees" is akin to the first shot in a film. Kaja Silverman discusses how a first image re-creates the viewer's experience of "an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference" (203); this perception "unmarked by difference" is therefore akin to the site or time in early child development prior to the child's "discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass." This separation from an ideal image, according to Lacan and others, is what brings about the child's entry into the social order and, eventually, into language. Yet while it is socially and psychologically necessary, it is also a moment of alienation because this image of a "cohesive identity" (Gallop, *RL*, 80) involves a sense of loss. The viewer's experience of a film is similarly

her identity as a woman" (46). He claims that men are active and gazing while "women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. . . . Thus [a woman] turns herself into an object--and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (47).

a fleeting moment of visual pleasure since one quickly discovers limitations to what at first seemed "imaginary plenitude."

The viewer discovers that the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself which he now understands to be arbitrary the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived as pleasurable. It is now the space which separates the camera from the characters. The latter have lost their quality of presence. The spectator discovers that his possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the gaze of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent. (Dayan in Silverman, 203)

The reader similarly realizes that she is "only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the gaze of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent." This "absent one" or narrator of *HER* directs the gaze which frames our knowledge of what Her Gart could not yet know, and then "cuts" into Her Gart's present knowledge. That is, the narrator seems to have the language that Her can only anticipate. This narrator might even be Her, reflecting back on a prior time when it had not yet occurred to her to put the thing in writing.

If "Her Gart was then no prophet" (3), what kind of prophet are we to expect Her to become, if it is only in retrospect that she (or someone who seems like her) can claim her dementia "was predictable by star, by star-sign, by year" (3)? Even the anticipation of knowledge or "word for her dementia" is underscored by the indeterminacy of that knowledge as it is articulated by the narrator's irony: "...and that conniving phrase 'arrested development' had opened no door to her" (3). Because the reader cannot definitely locate the moment from which the narrator speaks, chronology and narrative certainty are undermined. In her discussion of narrative, de Lauretis claims that "linear time, with its logic of identity and non-contradiction, its predication of a definite identification of characters and events, before or after a

'now' which is not 'not now', a here where 'I' am, or an elsewhere where 'I' am not, is a necessary condition of all investigation and of all narrative" (97). H.D.'s text calls into question what de Lauretis calls the "logic of identity and non-contradiction" because its narrative technique makes the definite identification of characters, if not impossible, at least problematic. Where is "now" or "not now" in this text?

By playing with the "here where 'I' am," the narrative encourages an anticipation of the knowledge Hermione does not currently enjoy. For example, we read early in the text that "Her's energy must go groping forward in a world where there was no sign to show you 'Oedipus complex,' no chart to warn you 'mother complex,' shoals threatening" (47). Hermione is groping in a terrain without signs; an emotional bog in which all of her energy "must" be spent in the struggle to keep herself from drowning. The narrator knows about the emotional imperative involved and has the psychoanalytic knowledge Hermione lacks regarding a "chart to warn you 'mother complex', shoals threatening," a knowledge which suggests that *she* has already detached from the thing Hermione cannot yet see. The narrator seems to be the Other presumed to know. While Kaja Silverman's discussion of the cinematographic "absent one" refers to this Other as the "mythically potent symbolic father" who has all the attributes of "potency, knowledge, transcendental vision, self-sufficiency and discursive power" (204), in H.D.'s text these same attributes seem to refer more specifically to a maternal omnipotence. And the narrator who seems to have vision and "discursive power" creates a passive position for the reader who is subject to the narrative's controlling gaze.

Of course the reader may not acknowledge that she "feels dispossessed of what [s]he is prevented from seeing," but I believe that critics' various accounts of the text are all ways to extricate themselves from the hypnotic realm of maternal fusion which is represented here by Eugenia; ways of inscribing "a definite identification of

characters and events" where definite identification is made difficult by the narrative. The critics' blurring between character and narrator, between Fayne and Her, and between Hermione and H.D., certainly attests to a problem of "definite identification." Instead of reading Eugenia's behaviour as stifling or problematic, readers focus instead on Hermione's sexualities or any other aspects of Hermione's attempts to find her own voice. Like Hermione who does not speak what Eugenia does not want to hear, these readers look for the supposed affection between them and suppress the knowledge of the lack in their relationship. That is, they foreclose the maternal loss which is crucial to subjectivity. Silverman says, the "disruption of imaginary plenitude" is what sets off the complex process of a "signifying chain . . . introduced in place of the lack which can never be made good" (204).¹⁷ Lacanian analysts would call this irremedial lack *castration*. Jane Gallop refers to it as the "loss of the comforting belief in the omnipotent Mother who guards and can ensure the daughter's life" (*DS*, 115). Yet, however one might name this loss, "it is only by inflicting the wound to begin with that the . . . subject can be made to want the restorative of meaning and narrative" (Silverman, 204).

In H.D.'s novel the "wound" has already been inflicted—the loss has already occurred. But Hermione sustains a fantasy of fusion to repress her knowledge of that loss because she has no one else with which to identify. Her father as an "other" is

¹⁷Writing, by implication, might seem to "make good" this lack; H.D.'s novel about her mother can be read as an attempt at recovering this point of origin, while the act of writing is paradoxically also what releases her from attachment to this origin. Writing is itself part of the construction of the writer/narrator's subjectivity.

Margaret Homans has referred to this lack as "the gap between child and mother opened up by the simultaneous arousal and prohibition of incest" (in Kloepfer, *UM*, 98); she also writes that it is language that "promises to cross, even while operating through dependence on that gap." Kloepfer has this notion in mind when she insists that H.D. saw "the sign [as] the mark not of absence but of presence. For this reason [H.D.] grapples to textualize 'the story,' working her experiences and relationships through verse and prose obsessively. In the word she finds not the sign of the gap but the way to close the gap" (109).

emotionally absent; George Lowndes can only see her as she figures in his romantic script as something "so damned decorative." Her Gart's gradual entry into the knowledge of her maternal loss is contingent upon her meeting of a person finally "Other" to her—someone who recognizes her difference and who is "truly outside, with an equivalent centre of desire" (Benjamin, 73)—someone who changes Her Gart's experience of herself in language.

CHAPTER 2

An Eye for an I

The three old women [the Fates of Greek mythology] all pass around the same organ. If they did not share their eye they could not see. In order to have her own vision, each must use the means by which the others see. In dialogism this sharedness is indeed the nature of fate for us all. For in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of other. Restated in its crudest version, the Bakhtinian just-so story of subjectivity is the tale of how I get my self from the other: it is only the other's categories that will let me be an object for my own perception. I see my self as I conceive others might see it. In order to forge a self, I must do so from *outside*. In other words *I author myself*.

-Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*

Michael Holquist compares the use of the first person pronoun to the mythological shared eye of the Greek Fates, and while his tale of dialogism is not specifically addressed to questions of modernist narrative, it can be used to elaborate H.D.'s project. When Her Gart uses "the means by which the others see," she is *not* provided with any image of her self as "others might see it." Or rather, "the other's categories"—both narrative genres and psycho-sexual conventions—are inadequate mirrors for the "self" who desires to speak in *HER*. This problem of inadequate mirroring is particularly the case in her mother's realm where Hermione founders against an absence, both an emotional absence and the lack of any reflection of her own subjectivity. Because she can not at first acknowledge this maternal abandonment, Hermione looks to other relationships for the necessary mirror of her self. However, until she becomes conscious of her maternal loss, she can only reenact with others her role of daughter to an abandoning mother.¹⁸

¹⁸ For the reader familiar with H.D.'s layered cosmology, the name Hermione resonates with associations of abandonment. Hermione is the daughter

Her Gart knows that she wants something (the connotations of desire and lack are both present in this 'want'); she wants "the half of herself that was forever missing" (16), but is also convinced that "[i]t was obvious she could never find it" (8). The object of her desire is always just out of reach, endlessly deferred and unattainable, but she nonetheless imagines it in the form of an object or other, especially an ideal sister, "...a creature of ebony strung with wild poppies or an image of ivory whose lithe hips made parallel and gave reflection of like parallel in a fountain basin" (10). This imagined sister who would "parallel and g[i]ve like parallel" indicates a desire for intersubjectivity; a desire for reciprocal relationship with a woman who could "parallel" or adequately mirror her subjectivity; a desire for a surrogate mother. Her Gart's search for this surrogate functions both to mask and to speak of her emotional conflicts. As Marianne Hirsch explains, the figure of the ideal sister "... highlights the maternal as function, but rejects and makes invisible the actual mother, who, it is implied, infantilizes the daughter and fails to encourage autonomy" (164). Her Gart's image of this ideal "creature of ebony" similarly highlights the maternal function of mirroring, while sparing Her from consciously acknowledging her criticism, if not her actual repudiation of her mother. Although Her Gart is not at first aware of a problematic maternal relationship, the psychic configuration of that bond becomes apparent to the reader before it does to Hermione.

In an early section of the novel, a section ostensibly about Hermione's sister-in-law Minnie and her neurotic insinuations into the Gart family, we see how unconscious criticism works its way into the narrative. Almost every sentence indicates condensed or displaced knowledge at work. When Hermione sees her own reflection in the springhouse water, she shivers,

abandoned by her famous mother--the woman represented by *Helen in Egypt* whom Friedman describes as "... unknown to her husband, her child, and most importantly to herself" (PR. 63). Also, H.D.'s mother's name was Helen Eugenia Wolle.

. . . seeing a face reflected in the water that was almost as unpleasing to her as the thought of Minnie. Forehead too high, hair too lank, eyes that stared and stared, blobs of inconsequent blackness. A face foreshortened in a slightly rippled surface may give back poor reflection. She did not consider this, remembering only that this summer was to have been her glory. (11)

Her's reflection is not her *own* but a distorted, excessively ugly image ("forehead too high, hair too lank, eyes that [are] . . . blobs of inconsequent blackness"). Instead of bringing about a narcissistic self-love—the narcissism of which George later accuses her—Hermione's reflected image is "almost as unpleasing to her as the thought of Minnie."¹⁹ She can take no pleasure in self-reflection, since the "her" who finds the image unpleasing recalls again the I/Her conflation within the daughter's psychic make-up; how much of Hermione's displeasure is actually hers? Because Hermione cannot yet realize that "a slightly rippled surface may give back poor reflection," she experiences herself as deformed; she cannot yet see this deformation as a consequence of her family's distorted mirroring of her subjectivity. The "thought of Minnie" is therefore tangled up with her self perception because Minnie serves as an embodiment of what Hermione cannot yet know.

Hermione insists that she desires an ideal sister whom she imagines with a companion wolfhound, but instead she meets with Minnie's dog Jock. Unlike the fantasy wolfhound, Jock is "an ungracious substitute...her instinct was to beat him off" (10). Since the dog has the same "homely smutty colour...of Minnie's overly colourful hair," Hermione conflates their shared features, projecting her feelings about Minnie onto Minnie's dog. That is, *Minnie* is "an ungracious substitute" for a sister. Yet when one recalls that the figure of an ideal sister suggests yet another displaced figure, in this case the mother who "fails to encourage autonomy," one realizes by the degree

¹⁹ There are various ways of understanding "narcissism," but for the sake of this discussion, I mean a "healthy narcissism" or necessary sense of self. (Rycroft calls this "proper self respect"[94].)

of displacement and deferral in Hermione's association, the significant taboos and profound resistances she faces regarding her mother. The dog displaces Minnie who represents Hermione's disavowed feelings toward Eugenia:

"Minnie is my sister" had been enjoined on her by Eugenia who said, "In our family my mother never referred to Nell or Carnia as daughters-in-law." (10)

Hermione is enjoined by Eugenia against acknowledging her dislike for Minnie.²⁰ "Minnie, Her's sister-in-law, therefore, by a rule that had roots moss-grown in Pennsylvania, became by some illogical reasoning 'my sister'" (10). It is a maternal and "moss-grown" law which functions more powerfully in the daughter's psyche than any law of a father, and, for Hermione, this maternal authority legislates the capacity for both knowledge and speech. So, for example, when Hermione feels resentment, "How dare this little upstart gossip butt in..." she *enjoins* herself to "shut up, shut up Hermione, don't speak" (39). Because it is forbidden, Hermione's resentment towards Minnie is displaced towards Minnie's dog. But as Freud has shown in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, this sort of initial displacement acts as a red herring across the trail of another desire. Minnie's dog is the last link on a metonymic chain which begins with Hermione's desire to repudiate Eugenia's "moss-grown" rule: her desire to separate from her mother.²¹

²⁰*The Oxford English Dictionary* points out that "to enjoin" is not only "to prohibit or forbid" (in early use it meant "to impose [a penalty, duty, etc.] said especially of a spiritual director; hence to prescribe authoritatively and with emphasis"); it also means "to impose rules on oneself." The use of this word to describe Eugenia's rule indicates how what at first works as an external prohibition becomes eventually an internalized, self-generated act.

²¹ Eugenia's name is also etymologically suggestive: *Eu* with words of Greek derivation means "good, well, easily" and as a prefix suggests something about both "genius" and "genial"--good quality of mind, goodness in prevailing character or destiny, also known in the familiar axiom: *If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.* Or in this case, if you cannot think something nice, don't think at all?

Minnie Hurloe functions as a scapegoat for Hermione's gradually changing consciousness. By blaming Minnie for having tainted the sanctuary of home, Hermione can continue with her sentimental idealization of Eugenia.²²

Minnie had a way of making Eugenia and her rightness and discrimination wrong. How *has* Eugenia stood it? Minnie was gaping at Her, everywhere she looked was Minnie. Something's happened, something's happened to Gart, everywhere; . . . Minnie made Gart hallway and the wood lilies and Pius Wood so much junk. She ate into things, predicted inferiority complex, words that had no place in the consciousness of Her. (25)

Minnie thus becomes the locus of Hermione's own displaced traitorous criticisms, and the source of lost maternal plenitude. But Minnie Hurloe is actually the least of Hermione's "problems." Her Gart's epistemological obstacle lies more in her belief in "Eugenia and her rightness and discrimination," since Eugenia's "discrimination" blocks language and its associated thoughts—"words that had no place in the consciousness of Her." Her's maternal idealization leads to "dependence and subservience" instead of "imitation and emulation" (Rycroft, 67).

Eugenia's perspective frames and constrains her daughter's. This can be seen, for example, when Hermione notices a trail of dust near the Farrand meadows which border Gart Grange—notices some activity *outside the realm* of the Gart perspective. The Farrands, perhaps like Her, "even had found Pennsylvania 'dull' and 'unrewarding'"(11). However,

²² Rycroft differentiates between idealization and admiration "in that (a) the idealizing person needs a perfect person to exist and ignores (denies. . .) the existence of those attributes of the idealized person which do not fit the picture and (b) it leads to dependence on and subservience to the idealized person and not to emulation and imitation. Idealization is a defence against the consequences of recognizing ambivalence and purchases freedom from guilt and depression at the cost of self-esteem" (67). Hermione's perception and protection of her mother also seems like the identification Kristeva describes "resulting from a sentimental . . . archaic and ambivalent affection for the maternal object, more frequently produced by the impetus of guilt-producing hostility"[KR. p.249] That is, Hermione's own unconscious hostility toward her mother is projected onto Minnie so that Hermione can alleviate her guilt.

Her rarely thought of the Farrands, people with too much money. Strung to a pith of loyalty to her "class" she had rarely dared consider what "money" could do. "The Farrands are really nice," Eugenia put in, "though you know" (tolerantly) "business people." (11)

Hermione cannot even think about what her mother finds intolerable and she cannot know that this ignorance lies at the heart of her epistemological condition.²³ Thus she ironically accents "class" and "money," which obscures that her "pith of loyalty" is actually to Eugenia, while ascribing to the Farrands whatever cannot be contained by Eugenia's "rightness."

Although Hermione's references to the Farrand forest occur infrequently, they recall and sometimes foreshadow her struggle to perceive what lies outside of her family's psychological perspective.²⁴ At about mid-point in the novel, when Hermione is drifting along rather unconsciously towards marriage to George Lowndes, she finds a boy who "was shooting in the Farrand forest and caught his leg in a trap that the Farrand coachman or caretaker had . . . left out for trespassers" (114). The neighbours' forest is again associated with a trespass or transgression—one that does not always stay within the borders of Farrand property.

Hermione heard him howling, ran into the Gart woods to find him half-way down their woodpath dragging the trap on an ankle. The woodpath was splashed with raw blood almost to the Werby cross-field. (114)

²³See R.D. Laing's *Politics of the Family and Other Essays*. Laing defines repression as this type of ignorance regarding a rule for ignorance, or ". . . forgetting and forgetting that one has forgotten" (96), which is certainly the case between Her Gart and her mother. I refer in particular to Laing's notion of "rules and metarules"; although it makes for a long quotation, Laing is most concise when he describes the psychic operations whereby
 "each part of the social world system
 (i) is endowed with a value by the fact that there is a rule governing it.
 (ii) There may be a rule that this value must not be changed, challenged, questioned, or even seen.
 (iii) There may be a rule not only against *seeing* that there is such a value, and that there is a rule (i), but. . . [etc.]" (106).

²⁴Farrand is also the maiden name of Professor Doolittle's first wife (Guest, 14).

The image of this blood-splashed boy "half-way down *their* woodpath" intimates that Gart Grange is not impermeable, though Hermione does not yet recognize this.

Instead of considering the Farrands, Hermione focuses on the remarks "Eugenia put in." These remarks and the narrator's repeated parenthetical references to Eugenia's perspective indicate that the gossipy or peripheral asides by Her's mother are more insidious than they might seem. Eugenia's consciousness is a container so tenacious (and simultaneously subterranean or difficult to ascertain) that her daughter cannot puncture this maternal envelope; it frames Hermione's capacity for thought, directs her actions, legislates her feelings.²⁵

Therefore it should come as no surprise that Her Gart "could put no name to the things she apprehended" (13), or that "it had not occurred to Her to try and put the thing in writing" (13). Naming "the things she apprehended" demands a distinction between subjects and objects; it demands a space or distance from the mother. Since Hermione and her mother are not "other" to each other, their strange and painful fusion incapacitates the daughter, if not both of the women, from speaking for herself. In order to "put the thing in writing," Her Gart will have to sacrifice her fantasy of

²⁵On almost every page of the text one finds some reference to Eugenia's perspective, but critics seem to overlook these peripheral remarks in the same way Hermione does. But taking Eugenia's word for a situation has important consequences. For Her Gart, one of these consequences is self-betrayal. She is, for example, expected to tolerate her whiney sister-in-law for reasons set by her mother, because Minnie is from "North Philadelphia which after all (Eugenia said) explained it" (12). Yet Eugenia's explanation says more about her desires of her daughter--the expectations she exerts over Hermione's inner life--than anything about Minnie's origins.

Many critics do not even discuss Eugenia's character. Or they refer, in passing, to her conventional "femininity," or else they assert a maternal power and presence, like Hermione does, to cover over her absence. In the mainstream of feminist criticism, as in *Breaking the Sequence*, we read, for example, that Her Gart identified with trees, "symbol of matriarchal power as well as religion, the Tree of Life, fruition and the 'Sylvania' of her home state" (Wagner-Martin, 149).

fusion with her oblivious mother—will have to replace "Her" with "I." Again she looks away from home for such knowledge:

The light would always be about to fall above the Farrand forest. The Farrand forest was sealed in consciousness ... in the Farrand forest was sacrifice, was redemption. (115)

The forest is a place associated with transgression, with traps "left out for trespassers" (114), because it is also related to Eugenia's enjoined perspective. Only if Hermione can break through what "was sealed in consciousness," will she experience this sacrifice and redemption she desires. Only if she becomes conscious of her mother's rules will she be able to trespass against them.

Or perhaps the act of a later speech is itself what brings this character to consciousness. Because the narrator, with her current awareness, is looking back to a time preceding this awareness, she retroactively perceives a pattern of her own making. That is, the narrative about Her Gart has, at its disposal, the knowledge which Her Gart then only anticipated. Thus the narrator can inscribe suggestive traces of this coming knowledge—traces which can slip past the reader as easily as they elude Hermione. For example, Her Gart at first does not know that she perceives her mother as a psychic container so encompassing that Eugenia *is* herself—Her Gart only knows that certain thoughts threaten her "own" sense of self. She therefore continues to split off any criticism of her mother by criticizing Minnie instead:

The mind of Her Gart was a patchwork of indefinable associations. She must escape Gart and Gart Grange, the Nessus shirt of guilt, phobia, rehabilitation. To be rehabilitated meant tearing fibre and flesh out with the Nessus shirt of 'Be careful of the hall floor,' and Minnie's 'I know you never liked me.' (24)

Her Gart can know about "guilt, phobia" as they are ascribed to Minnie's plaintive accusation, but she forecloses the identity of the other speaker—the one who speaks "familiar admonition" about the hall floor—the one connected to "Gart and Gart

Grange" who inspires these images of violent "rehabilitation"—her mother. Yet through metonymic displacement, the narrative conveys the identity of this one who inspires "guilt, phobia"; metonymy brings forward the repressed violence of Her's "indefinable associations."

Jane Gallop has argued that metonymy "bodies forth lack" (*RL*, 124) and that it has "tricks and detours that, according to Lacan, allow it to 'get around the obstacles of social censorship'" (*RL*, 129). This is certainly the case in the novel:

Her stepped precisely on flat tiles, a child game remembered. Her foot was just too long to avoid crack in tile. Her feet had been small in the large square of tile, had been bigger, had almost not fitted. Her feet did not fit any longer into the kitchen tiles. (25-26)

The narrative recalls "a child game remembered," but then splits up the language of the nursery rhyme so that what might have been obvious about her current predicament gets lost in the nostalgic reference to a time when she had been small enough to fit within her mother's domain. Instead of "step on a crack, break your mother's back," we read how she stepped on *tiles*, and then how her foot "was just too long to avoid crack." The words "foot" and "tiles" preempt the familiar signifying chain of "step on a crack," obscuring or deferring its inevitable conclusion. This passage does not make it clear that Hermione cannot help but "break her mother's back"; the image is embedded within a series of other associations—nostalgic references that obscure the potential violence. But the "forbidden" has nonetheless left its trace. The necessity of breaking her mother's hold on Her is a process as significant to her subjectivity as is her physical growth: her foot "had been small . . . had been bigger, had almost not fitted . . . did not fit any longer." And, as can be seen in the above passages, it is inevitable for the daughter who would write in her own person.

However, while separation is crucial, it is not accomplished without ambivalence. Since Her Gart perceives herself to be enjoined to Eugenia, "breaking

her mother's back" means simultaneously breaking something in herself or "tearing fibre and flesh out with the Nessus shirt" (24). A fantasy of "Eugenia's rightness" leaves little space for Hermione, but the alternative of authoring herself against abandonment does not seem like an easy choice. Her double bind is further compounded by Eugenia's anxiety at the possibility of their separation; whenever Hermione asserts her growing confidence, Eugenia laments "Hermione this will *kill* me" (95). Both of the women feel the anxiety and ambivalence regarding their fusion which "leaves mother and daughter convinced that any separation between them will bring disaster to both" (Chodorow, 135). From the beginning of the novel, Hermione has been struggling against a sense of impending disaster, but she also courts this disaster. After all, how can Hermione speak as a subject if Eugenia *is Her*?

Hermione's arguments with her mother suggest an awareness of her need to distinguish between them—an awareness of separation between "I" and "her." Hermione speaks of politics, of "[t]his business of the United States, United States of America doing away with states being separate with separate states and each state with its own laws . . ." (78). Yet this speech about separation falls, as usual, on deaf ears; "Eugenia hadn't heard a word of what she had been saying" (79). Eugenia is oblivious to her daughter's assertions of self, and absent as an interlocutor. But the reader can see that Hermione's argument regarding a "united state" conveys her own desire for upheaval:

"This thing that any one can say *united we stand* is all rot. We can't stand united. Divided we would probably stand. . . . You can't expect things to go on forever this way. You'll get mob rule, and then mob rule and then mob rule." (78-79)

In fact, Eugenia's act of ignoring her daughter indicates that she *can* "expect things to go on forever this way." So the reader who chooses Eugenia's perspective is also confronted with "mob rule and then mob rule and then mob rule." The novel

presents a subtext of repressed violence and upheaval; from the emotional "Nessus shirt" to a suggestion of matricide, to the threat of "mob rule," Hermione's delirious language both reveals and conceals the painful consequences of speaking for her self.

Because her subjectivity is intolerable and threatening to the fused mother/daughter dyad, it slips "between the cracks" of what Hermione can consciously consider. The reader who gets caught up in this deferred and displaced narrative therefore has to confront his or her own interpretive desires. If one asks of the novel, *what is this delirium about?* one meets with one's own "passion for knowledge"—what Kristeva refers to as

... the subject's subjugation to the desire to know. Desire and the desire to know are not strangers to each other, up to a certain point. What is that point? (KR, 308)

For many readers, matricide is the point at which interpretive desire is blocked by an underlying taboo—perhaps Eugenia's injunction against considering such a reading.

H.D. certainly censored herself in the realm of this maternal taboo but recent scholarship that has brought to light H.D.'s revised manuscript indicates that posthumous editorial choices also omit explicit violence.²⁶ The editor of this published version of the novel has also omitted an explicit reference to matricide, a

²⁶ Susan Stanford Friedman's recently published *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction* includes a typescript page from H.D.'s manuscript. In the draft of the scene in which Hermione mentions "United States" and "mob rule," H.D. originally had described Hermione looking at Eugenia and fantasizing murder. She imagines Eugenia's head coming unscrewed, how it "would totter forward, would fall over like a scarecrow when you hurl a pumpkin at it. If I hurl a pumpkin at Eugenia her head will roll off and they will hold me responsible for matricide" (figure 2, 422). In her concluding notes to this scored-through illustration, Friedman says that these deletions were probably made by H.D. in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

reference that H.D. seems to have left in the text.²⁷ In the oft-quoted scene of Eugenia's and Hermione's "confinement," Her says to her mother:

"You never listen to what I say, mama. *I said you ought to be guillotined.* Your throat looks so pretty coming out of that ruffle...like a moon-flower with a sort of stamen pistil sort of thing, the sort of throat that you have rising out of a moon-ruffle." (my emphasis; *Montemora* 8, 11)

The omission of the phrase I have italicized in the New Directions publication is a telling editorial choice. In this scene, Hermione is articulating her frustration directly to her mother who characteristically answers, "You say such pretty, odd things" (80), which indicates that even explicit references to matricide cannot shake Eugenia from her hypnotic state. This omission of Hermione's talk of the guillotine suggests that some readers are in a relationship to the text which mirrors Hermione's relation to her mother who sits

... in the dark like a great moth, dimity dressing jacket, feet crossed on a low pouf thing, hands knitting, hands, hands...knitting. Eugenia worked her old charm. She hypnotizes me. (80)

The editor of this text seems also to have been hypnotized by Eugenia's "old charm," because the scene now focusses on Eugenia appearing "so pretty" instead of the "pretty, odd things" spoken by her daughter.²⁸

Before she can speak with her own voice, Hermione must confront her mother's hypnotic charm with its injunction to silence. She has to discover or invent what Kristeva calls a "*replacement* for what the speaker perceives as an archaic

²⁷Before New Directions published the novel as *HERmione* in 1981, segments of it appeared in *Montemora* 8, edited by Duplessis and Friedman. I find the difference between these two versions significant.

²⁸Friedman, in her discussion of the storm scene, similarly agrees to Eugenia's perspective by insisting that Hermione "connects with the lost mother...when the furious storm leads the mother to recreate the scene of the daughter's birth" (*PW*, 124). This reading suggests to me that the reader, like Hermione, frequently imagines the mother as Demeter when Eugenia is oblivious or absent.

mother" (*DL*, 291); and leaving her perceived "united state" she has to risk "mob rule and mob rule." Hermione turns away from her mother, at first looking for a literal "replacement" for Eugenia, only to find intensified instability and a multiplication of questions regarding what was "like Her and what was unlike Her?" (188). The reader of this instability thus has to confront her or his own desires to know and to speak, since "the very fact of positing oneself as interpreter, regardless of the actual meaning one finds in one's subject . . . is rooted in the subject's need for reassurance as to the stability of his or her identity" (Moi in *KR*, 301). Reading *HER*, one realizes the extent to which "the stability of [an] identity" rests on a fiction.

Chapter 3

Her as the Author of Herself

Hélène Cixous writes that "there is no *invention* possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of the other, of variety . . ." (84). This notion of a necessary "abundance of the other" certainly speaks to Her Gart's situation, since she means to invent both herself and her poetry. Her choice of lovers can be read in this context as part of her search for the "otherness" that would enable her to invent. Her Gart moves back and forth between George Lowndes and Fayne Rabb trying to find an "other" who might "parallel and give like parallel"; and although neither lover provides an ideal reflection, her oscillation between them provides Hermione with important, if unexpected, insights into the maternal relationship which is "the thing back of the thing . . . that mattered" (198).

Most critics read Hermione's movement between Fayne and George as a bisexual oscillation which criticizes conventional heterosexual romance and valorizes lesbian experience.²⁹ Yet although the novel is critical of the conventional romantic paradigm—the paradigm is inadequate both psychologically and as a narrative genre for the female artist/subject—it is also careful with its praise of "sister-love." A

²⁹Duplessis argues that the novel is a critique of the romantic heterosexual conventions which ". . . could be termed 'scripts' for both literary plots and personal relations" ("Romantic Thralldom," 177). She claims that these "scripts" present the novel's heroine with ". . . a classic dilemma for woman: the necessity to choose between being a muse for another and being an artist herself" (180). Yet while the choice between the role of muse and her own artistic agency is important in H.D.'s novel, Her Gart's choices are in no way as clear-cut as Duplessis describes. Because Her Gart's desire to write is ensnared within what the narrator refers to as "mother-complex, shoals threatening," her capacity for choice is limited by "scripts" to which she has no conscious access.

reading of the text as a sexualities debate thus succumbs to what Lacan has called "the eternal temptation to consider that what is most apparent in a phenomenon is what explains everything" (Gallop, *RL*, 127). Reading for the "most apparent," in this case for an either/or choice of sexual partner, indicates a readerly desire to ascertain "what explains everything" when confronted with a text that so resists a final word.

Regarding *HER*, the reader would be better advised by Her Gart's own observations about "what is most apparent in a phenomenon": that is, "... if she went on and on saying the same thing perhaps in time people would realize that the thing back of the thing was the thing that mattered" (198).

In George, Hermione looks for the lover who would serve as her vehicle into the world. "She wanted George to say, 'God, you must give up this putrid megalomania, get out of this place'" (63), yet at the same time she also feels that when she is with George, "almost she had found her mother—wood-goddess on a woodpath" (67). By portraying a heterosexual romance in light of the heroine's desire for a maternal figure, H.D.'s novel addresses the romantic paradigm from an unusual position. As the narrative continues, Hermione *does* find her mother in George, although not in the way she might have expected.

George "wanted Her, but he wanted a Her that he called decorative" (172). Hermione is familiar enough with narrative conventions to try and correlate her own desires with the romantic paradigm:

Regarding him, very hot on the woodpath, Hermione became almost collegiate of the period, almost a person with hair up and with long skirts. Her became almost Hermione as she looked at George with his collar torn open at the throat, turned-back Byronic collar, clean shirt, hot underarms in great symmetrical patches. (64)

But this portrayal of an "almost collegiate" girl and her Byronic boyfriend turns out to be a relentless psycho-sexual script. As Cixous has said of such conventions,

"... the first obstacle, always already there, is in the existence, the production and reproduction of images, types, coded and suitable ways of behaving, and in society's identification with a scene in which roles are so fixed that lovers are always initially trapped by the puppets with which they are assumed to merge" (113). Hermione and George get caught up in this sort of "identification with a scene in which roles are so fixed"; Hermione feels that "[t]hey were in a play and it was easy to make speech out of a play" (168), and that complicity with "bad novel" (169) conventions can only suffocate her and blot out her experience of her self.

What Hermione does not at first see about the "bad novel" convention is the way George's smudging over or obliterating Her is similar to Eugenia's style of not seeing. Instead of acting like a Hades figure who would sever the maternal connection, George offers Hermione a translated maternal relationship through the continuation of a role with which she is all too familiar. With George she would be censored or enjoined to silence in the way that Eugenia censors her ("George had said, 'Don't talk such rot Hermione'" [137]); and she would become like her mother in marriage—a silent support or decorative object for the so-called great man. She would remain her mother's daughter, "wood-goddess on a woodpath," a creature indistinguishable from the original maternal enclosure of Pennsylvania. Yet George nonetheless does provide one important "mirror" to Her in the novel—a mirror image of which he is unaware. At a time when Hermione struggles with her own maternal bond, she witnesses George's mother as "some sort of odd person who was part of the roar of George outside a circus tent . . ." (104); recognition of Lillian as "part of the roar of George" provides a rough parallel to Hermione's own psychic situation.

When Her Gart first meets George's mother, it is Lillian's voice which strikes her attention, and the subtle power of this maternal voice has a lasting effect on Hermione. "The person that went with the voice was a stranger but the voice was not

a stranger's voice, it was the voice of George, it was George shouting outside a circus tent (flap) . . . " (102). Her recognizes the maternal inside the filial voice, or rather that George, too, is enclosed by a maternal perspective:

George like a showman was in that odd far voice, shut up in a shell voice, bee drowning in a flower voice, "I have so much to tell you."
(103)

The rhythmic language used to account for the voice suggests both its hypnotic power and Hermione's difficulty in accurately locating its position. It is part of George but also contains him "shut up in a shell"; the voice represents a configuration in which the mother is part of the son's discourse and vice versa, each pair of the dyad shifting their position as objects of each other's utterance.

Although George and Lillian in this way mirror Hermione's relation to Eugenia, they are a very different sort of dyad because they are a mother and *son*. George flirts with his mother by using the same terms of endearment he has spoken to Hermione.

George came in then. "Bella, most Bellisima, how do you like Belinda?" singing it, chanting it as George would do and looking up to face George with hair just not matching his mother's hair and hearing her say "Ginger I hate that new name". . . . (104)

Lillian and Hermione in fact are similar; they share similar aesthetic sensibilities and a love of language (and, perhaps, a love for George). Lillian speaks to Hermione "equal to equal" (104) and recognizes her intellectual abilities:

"You *are* like George." "Like *George*?" "He's always playing with words, juggling, I tell him, like a circus rider." "George is rather like a circus rider" (It was odd she should have seen it.) (111)

But this mutual recognition and appreciation is a double-edged sword for Hermione. Unlike Eugenia, or, for that matter Carl Gart, Lillian recognizes Hermione's talents as equivalent to her son's.

Hermione has sought this parental recognition all her life, except that Lillian does not intend by her recognition to encourage Hermione's sense of agency. Lillian is narcissistically flattered by George's choice of fiancée: Hermione's play with language will only make her an appropriate wife to the son, a wife who is like his mother, a wife who will presumably reproduce the age old "family romance."³⁰ Lillian even encourages Hermione to sacrifice her agency by calling her ". . . Undine. Or better the mermaid from Hans Anderson" (112), a name which perhaps reflects Lillian's own unspoken "sacrifice." Hermione considers how,

Undine long ago was a mermaid, she wanted a voice or she wanted feet. "Oh I remember. You mean I have no feet to stand on?" This is what Lillian means. Lillian is the first to find me out. There is something about Lillian. She knows perfectly well that I don't belong, that there is no use. Lillian has found out that my name is Undine. (113)

Hermione fortunately misreads Lillian, ascribing to Lillian her own knowledge that "there is no use" when in fact Lillian looks forward to Hermione as a daughter-in-law. Lillian is thus an inadvertant catalyst for Her Gart's "authoring" of herself. Whereas Hermione's own parents offer only the absence of any reflection, Lillian at least provides a narrative or a category that allows Hermione to be an object for her own perception. Hermione sees her self as she imagines Lillian might see it, which in turn enables Her to "forge a self."³¹ This forging a self from George's mother's narrative is hardly what George might have expected—the story of Lillian as an inadvertant mirror is H.D.'s way of re-examining the romantic paradigm.

³⁰That is, a woman with desires for agency has "penis envy" so she marries and has a son through whom she vicariously lives out her own ambitions.

³¹I am here recalling Holquist's summary of dialogism (28).

If Lillian is "the first to find [her] out" (113), Fayne Rabb is the other character in this novel who, like a Greek Fate, provides Hermione with a vision of herself. As in her relationship to George, Hermione's experiences with Fayne are informed by a subtext of maternal involvement. But when H.D. explores the relationship between two women, her novel comes to a significantly different conclusion regarding the way one's relation to the maternal affects self-representation. While Hermione ultimately rejects the paradigm of romance that would reproduce her mother's story, her connection to Fayne raises (with a vengeance) the problem of distinguishing and representing the female self as separate from her mother.

Every time Fayne and Her are described together, the reader is confronted with the third person pronoun which can represent either woman. The slippery pronominal distinctions between Her and "her" replicate the daughter's difficulty in distinguishing her own perspective—how does one represent difference between two people who, within a gendered economy, are considered the "same"?³² Fayne, with her strange prophetic utterances, perhaps best articulates the issues in their relationship. She says,

"...Something in you makes me hate you. Drawn to you I am repulsed, drawn away from you I am negated. You are not myself but you are some projection of myself. Myself, *myself*, projected you like water You are yet repressed, unseeing, unseen..." (146)

Fayne's declared sense of repulsion when drawn close, then negation when "drawn away" echoes Hermione's own rather dislocated feeling described at the beginning of the novel; "she wanted to get away, yet to be merged eventually with the thing she so loathed" (7). The same struggle with intersubjective borders that takes place with the

³²Duplessis, for one, seems determined not to distinguish the women. In her essay on "Romantic Thralldom in H.D." she argues that Her Gart contacts her "authentic identity" by loving Fayne who "represents self-love, self-identification, and a twinship between spiritual sisters" (*Contemporary Literature*, 181). Deborah Kloepfer says about them that "[t]here is a commingling of both bodies and identity . . ." (*UM*, 125).

maternal figures, and the ambivalence and difficulty of positing "...not myself . . . but some projection of myself," is replicated in the women's relationship. As Jane Gallop claims about a woman's relation to an other, ". . . the relation to the other woman only approaches its full complexity with some recognition that 'the other woman' as well as oneself is and is not 'Mother'" (DS, 116).

The need to recognize what "is and is not 'Mother'" is particularly urgent in view of Fayne's tyrannical mother with her language of "caustic sort of sarcastic belittlings" (151,52). In the company of the paranoid and devouring Mrs. Rabb, Her Gart cannot help but see the effect of a maternal perspective on daughterly behaviour. Even Hermione gets pulled into Mrs. Rabb's drama.

"Your friends, Pauline. They come—your friends, Pauline."³³ "Mama, they're *your* friends." "Oh Mrs. Rabb if only you would be, let me be your friend." Words from nowhere impelled Her Gart forward. She would have fallen at the knees of Mrs. Rabb, would have wound long arms around knees, would have made a goddess of her. Words impelled Her forward; make her see, blind her, gag her, throttle her with flattery. (156)

In order to protect herself and subdue Fayne's mother, Hermione "would have made a goddess of her," would betray herself in order to "gag her, throttle her with flattery." In spite of the obvious differences between Mrs. Rabb and Eugenia, both mothers affect their daughter's sense of self as it is associated with speech.

Both mothers, for example, assert possessive claims over their daughters by employing names—"Pauline" or "Her-mi-onie"—other than those the daughters prefer.³⁴ When Mrs. Rabb calls Fayne "Pauline," she reduces her daughter to a complicit and whining creature whose voice becomes a mere "rasp" that answers,

³³The fascination with Mrs. Rabb's language is also recalled by Fayne's love of the Swinburnian line "Your face Faustine."

³⁴In H.D.'s play with etymology, it is no accident that Fayne's naming of herself involves a connotation of the sacred, of pleasure ("to rejoice in, make glad), and also of the fictional or pretended, and "to decline participation in."

"Mama." Ma-aaa-ma bleated out it a,a,a, its ma-aaa-a-ma like some wild thing, like some goat on a hill-crest. (155)

The mother's "claim to Fayne" in fact requires the daughter's complicity—requires that the daughter share the maternal point of view.

H.D. represents the mother's point of view through the same cinematographic style she employs throughout the novel. In the scenes involving Mrs. Rabb, both young women seem to be controlled by the mother's perspective. Hermione is aware of how Mrs. Rabb would perceive her; "[c]rouched in the corner of the slippery horsehair sofa Her would have been taken for a disjointed, broken, utterly useless doll now *if Mrs. Rabb had seen her*" (my italics, 156). By imagining Mrs. Rabb's gaze, Hermione becomes the "disjointed, broken, utterly useless doll" that she feels herself to be as seen by this other; that is, by imagining the other's perspective, she becomes caught up within its frame. In the same paragraph, the narrative then "cuts" to a scene outside the house where "children dragged squeaky toys and a crowd of boys stamped the length of the pavement, following (one surmised) a shabby football" (156). By such juxtaposition or intersplicing of an apparently unrelated image, the hopelessness of the surrounding street life becomes an "objective correlative" for Fayne's situation.³⁵ The environs of the home, including the minds of its inhabitants, are framed as *if Mrs. Rabb had seen it*:

... and finally there were no boys' voices, just the dreary up and down, up and down of some child with some silly little toy, some drab duck probably dragged listlessly, dragged lifelessly, might as well drag a duck said the wheels of the little toy, I might as well be dragged said the toy duck, staring hopelessly with hopeless duck eyes down Greenway avenue. (157)

This image of dreary passivity correlates to Fayne's feelings in her mother's company.

³⁵Some feminist critics have argued that Eliot's notion of the image was, in part, a response to H.D.'s work.

Following on the heels, or rather the wheels of this account of futility, Fayne's voice is described as

a sort of utterance that went on mechanically like the squeak squeak of the hopeless little drab duck. . . . Like a drab toy that stared, the voice spoke. "You see we have each other." (157)

Mrs. Rabb's influence is such that Fayne, despite her capacity for prophecy and provocation, cannot see a way out of this damaging bond. Fayne explains in a defeated voice how her mother "never did let anyone come near [her]" (158); how her mother would have kept her out of school if it had not been for "the—the board of whatever it is you know" (158); and how once Fayne made her way into school with a scholarship for art, her mother persistently intruded to sabotage her:

". . . I got so far. Then mama said I was ill. That the girls at the academy were bad for me. She made me ill." "Yes" "Then nursed me." "Yes." "She would make me ill and then nurse me. I used to think and think and think until I saw things. . . . You make me see things." (158)

Although Fayne claims that Hermione makes her "see things," it is Hermione who now witnesses the emotional sabotage of this incestuous mother/daughter bond. Thus Fayne is a mirror to Her Gart, a reflection of certain aspects of her own maternal ties.³⁶

Through Fayne, Her Gart comes to recognize the emotional consequences for a daughter who is complicit with her mother's perspective.

³⁶Duplessis also writes that Hermione identifies with Fayne: "[b]y identifying with another wounded woman, the heroine perceives her own hurt and her own capacity for self-protection" ("Thralldom," 181). Duplessis's conviction regarding "self-protection," in light of her notion of a "twinsip between spiritual sisters," reveals that she agrees to Hermione's earlier belief in an ideal sister without examining its narrative or personal implications. Duplessis nowhere explores the source of injury for this "wounded woman," although the novel makes it clear that Fayne's mother is the source of her grief.

Things are not *agacant* now I know her. 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. (158)

The polysemic proliferation of pronouns here suggests that the multiple roles Fayne and Hermione play to each other mirror the slippery distinctions between mothers and daughters, as well as the difficulty of representing those distinctions. As a witness to Mrs. Rabb's effect on Fayne, Hermione can finally see how her own mother is a part of "her" and how these roles are reenacted with other women. But most importantly, this new insight represents a transgression of, if not a triumph over, Eugenia's enjoined rule against her daughter's sight.

Instead of blurred "gelatinous tree substance," Hermione's sight has cleared, enabling her to see Mrs. Rabb now represented by her manipulative voice.

The voice now was soft, it saw its mistake, it hated to be seen seeing its mistake. It strode out fearless. The voice of Mrs. Rabb strode out fearlessly; it said, I know no wrong. I love Paulet. It said I love Paulet in glittering surface, it rammed I love Pauline at you like the surface (hard and glazed) that hid Paulet in the showy old-fashioned photograph. The voice dressed up Paulet like the Paulet in the picture. The voice rasped I am a mother, I am her mother. I am mother, mother, mother. The voice said rather tenderly, "But we must not make your mother anxious." (159)

Mrs. Rabb has become a monstrously inflated "it" who obsessively asserts its primacy over the daughter. Hermione sees the psychological configuration which underlies what is actually said. Mrs. Rabb's sentimental solicitation—" . . . we must not make your mother anxious"—is a lie attempting to cover her violent desires to obliterate Fayne's subjectivity. Here is a mother who, to understate the case, does not experience her daughter as separate from herself. And, as Chodorow has shown, a daughter in such a relationship may well find it impossible to see herself as a separate person. To some extent, then, Fayne *is* obliterated by her mother.

Hermione might have come searching for a sister who "would parallel and give like parallel," but she meets instead a woman who parallels, after all, her own mother. Fayne alternates between megalomaniac pretences and gestures of defeat. For example, within a single conversation Fayne criticizes Hermione and her writing, then asserts, only half-jokingly god-like,

"But there is one grain in me will vanquish, conquer every one of you; one grain, certainly atomic, minute, but very core and centre of pure truth. I am pure truth when I *am*." (162)

Then from this regal self-inflation she collapses into the banal "'I'm no good—no good at anything.' Fayne said 'I'm no good at anything' as if one had asked her to play in a tennis tournament or join a bridge club" (163). Like her mother, Fayne chastises and sarcastically belittles, then demands reverence or consolation. And after having scorned George and mocked Hermione's relationship to him, Fayne insinuates her way between them; like her mother who cannot tolerate that Fayne has her own friends, Fayne "steals" George from her friend, proving herself to be her mother's daughter, "more constricting, more repressive, more damaging than the mother from whom she initially helps Hermione escape" (Kloepfer, *UM*, 127). Yet despite this betrayal, or perhaps because of it, Hermione has nonetheless found her "like parallel."

That is, her sojourns into the company of George and Fayne offer Hermione a perception of "the other's categories"—categories which are problematic, but which allow her at least a position to refuse. She finally recognizes that "sister love" is no easy affair and also refuses to be pulled into the story of the incestuous couple formed by George and Lillian. Her Gart has sought to leave her mother, but because she was not conscious of exactly who that mother is, Hermione could only reenact, albeit with

interesting variations, her unsatisfactory maternal bond.³⁷ She has wanted to speak, but found herself spoken by the stories of these others. The failure of each of these relationships is therefore what ultimately releases her from restrictive narrative paradigms.

"There's something wrong here"—she caught at a straw that sunk, and sinking, whirled Her into obliteration with it. "I've got a—sore throat or something..." (193)

Her throat, the site of her voice, protests to the oblivion of absorption in another's "story." Suffering through this protest, instead of keeping it at bay, changes her relationship to the "thing back of the thing,"—changes both her perception and her capacity to articulate herself as separate from her mother.

Hamshem and the Flood: "Trackless Pathways to Entrap It"

... if she went on and on saying the same thing perhaps in time people would realize that the thing back of the thing was the thing that mattered.

—H.D., *HER*

Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language.

Mikhail Bahktin, *The Dialogic Imagination*

When Hermione falls ill, she enacts with her body what has previously been operating at a psychic level; she has been searching for "a solid and visible form" (213) with which to identify—some discursive form, *so to speak*, for herself—and in the

³⁷ As Freud describes, "[t]he greater the resistance the more extensively will expressing in action (repetition) be substituted for recollecting" ("Recollection, Repetition, and Working Through," 370).

absence of this form, she collapses with a somatic illness which serves to speak for her.³⁸ Like the demented person described by Irigaray, Her Gart has been "spoken more than speaking";³⁹ she has found herself as an object in other peoples' narratives of her. In order to speak for herself, she will have to recombine the discourses of the others and somehow make them her own. This recombination of languages can be read in light of Bakhtin's notion of the novel as an arena for the "process of selectively assimilating the words of others" necessary for what he calls "the ideological becoming of a human being" (341). Her Gart collapses because she has been unsuccessful at "assimilating the words of others." But unlike the conventional collapse of a Victorian rest-cure, this "collapse" is motivated by a change of consciousness which necessitates, as Bakhtin claims, "choosing a language" (295). Her Gart's illness functions to articulate her prior lack of speech, and it provides her with the space to recognize, in language, her current consciousness.⁴⁰

The narrative continues in the peculiar chronology of retroactive recognition, although now it is at last Hermione herself rather than the narrator who speaks. That is, she has caught up, as it were, with what the narrator has known about her and thus constructs herself by reflecting on this self's history. She tells her nurse how her

³⁸ I have in mind here Kristeva's notion of somatic illness:

It is indeed true that one is ill when not loved; this means that a psychic structure that lacks an identifying metaphor or idealization tends to realize it in that embodied non-object called somatic symptom--illness. Somatic persons are not those who do not verbalize, they are subjects who lack or miscarry the dynamics of metaphoricity, which constitute idealization as a complex process. (*KR*, 254)

³⁹ Irigaray's definition of a person experiencing dementia (in *Moi*, 127) is similar to Kristeva's notion of delirium in that both theorists are accounting for aberrant language as the subject's inability to reconstitute an experience.

⁴⁰ While I agree with Kloepper that this dementia to which Hermione finally gives way is "occasioned by loss--alienation from Eugenia, betrayal by both Fayne and George" (*UM*, 127), I argue against her notion that "this madness, like maternity, like sexuality, dissolves the boundaries of self and other, inside and outside, in a vertiginous moment in which language unlatches." Her's language never was attached, and the categories of "inside and outside," etc. were always rather uncertain. This so-called madness provides a space in which Her Gart can better construct these borders.

earlier speech "had been only a wire beating with some message tick tick dot dot. . . . into an empty area" (214), as though she can now recognize how her speech had been addressed to an absent other. The nurse, Miss Dennon,

. . . stood on her own feet like Ham Shem and Japeth. Miss Dennon, it was obvious, stood on her own feet. "Are you a little tired of talking?" "No. I'm tired of not talking. It seems I have never talked. I want to talk and talk forever." (200)

Although the reader can never exactly ascertain just how someone might stand "on her own feet *like* Ham Shem and Japeth," this construction of the caregiver into a composite of Noah's sons is what enables Hermione to finally address an "other," and thereby posit herself as subject.⁴¹ She focuses on Ham and Shem, fusing the cursed son with the blessed, the one who sees the patriarch naked joined to the one who dutifully refuses to look at his unclothed father. By addressing herself to such a figure, she seems able to resolve the unreconciled "either/or" doublebinds that have plagued her: mother or self, George or Fayne, marriage or writing, math or art, and even feet or voice (to the extent she identifies with the little mermaid). These dichotomies seem false, or at least do not matter in the way they once did, when speaking to Hamshem who is *both*—one who knows fused to one who refuses to see.

This strange figure is a conscious recombination of the "I am Her" configuration. Instead of Her Gart's fusion with an other which brought about her inability to speak, she now addresses herself as "I" to an externalization of the composite figure who now is *not* her (or perhaps, not "I"). The nurse serves as a neutral screen against which Hermione can *make* sense, can say *I*. Nurse Dennon listens with her repeated encouragement of "Yes Miss Gart," "tying up odds and ends

⁴¹There has been very little analysis of this section of the novel with Hamshem. Guest writes as though Her's madness concludes the narrative "with a hysterical and near delirious Her being packed off to bed" (26).

and bits and bits and odds and ends" (199), tying up the current loose ends in Hermione's knowledge and also the loose ends in this narrative.

Nurse Dennon can perform this function because she is outside the desire-ensnarled languages of the other characters and does not have a personal investment in making Her into her own narcissistic fulfillment. Unlike Eugenia or Lillian, Fayne or George, Nurse Dennon is neither family member nor lover; she is paid to replace these people in a way similar to Jane Gallop's description of an "original analyst": "the earliest person paid to replace the mother is that frequent character in Freud's histories, the nursemaid/governess" (*DS*, 143). According to Gallop the nurse is desirable for her role as a threshold figure:

... her alterity is a stimulus, a tension, a disturbing itch in the composure of the family. But the desire for her is murderous. . . . it is her not belonging to the same economic class. (*DS*, 147)

While Hermione does not literally desire the nurse in this story, her desires become evident in her address to this outsider from whom she seeks understanding.⁴² The Hamshem figure offers a kind of "analytic neutrality" which make Hermione's speech possible. She does not always understand Hermione but she also does not say *no*, and this permission allows Hermione in turn to refuse her mother's visit, confident that "You know what I mean nurse" because she knows now what *she* means:

"Then you don't want to see your-your-mother?" "No I don't want to see my mother. She isn't." (200)

⁴²Nor Hall's discussion of the Demeter myth describes the role of the nurse as an aspect of mothering, except that "nursing is impersonal compared to mothering. . . . [the nurse's] history is not carried forward into the child, its life and death are not hers, her love for it is not complicated by a mother's fears and desires" (79). Eugenia Gart also describes a nurse in these terms; when she remembers Hermione's birth, she says that "the nurse was like a mother to me" (88).

Hermione's confidence in Hamshem's understanding indicates that the nurse does function as an analyst, as "the subject presumed to know" (Gallop, *RL*, 44). Because she believes that the nurse knows what she means, Hermione can repudiate Eugenia with an utterance that ambiguously suggests either an acknowledgement of her mother's psychological absence or a simple denial that "she isn't [my mother]."

This refusal of and separation from the mother is further suggested by the biblical allusion, which is "the thing behind the thing" Her Gart employs to speak of her own point of origin or genesis:

I am the word AUM. The word was with God, the place was
Pennsylvania. (198)

Her Gart is humourously accounting for her own equivalent of "in the beginning," and addresses this account to Genesis' historically later figures. The sons of Ham, Shem and Japeth were "a single people with a single language" which made them powerful and therefore intolerable to God who decided:

"Come let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so they can no longer understand one another." Yahweh scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth and they stopped building the town. It was named Babel therefore, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth." (Gen.11, 1-9)

Thus when Hermione calls the nurse Hamshem, she is addressing a single figure who represents two, a fused pair who "spoke the same language with the same vocabulary"; a people who, in the biblical account, said they would "make a name for [them]selves, so that [they] may not be scattered about the whole earth," prior to God's deliberate confusion of their tongues. This composite recalls, by association, the way Hermione was enjoined by Eugenia to share a single and unspeaking perspective—a perspective indicating the persistence of the mother's fantasy of preoedipal fusion with her daughter, as well as her insistence that Hermione agree to this fantasy by sharing "the same vocabulary."

To this figure Hermione says,

...Mama of course being always winter violets. Mama of course being violets under a glass frame and violets in little pottery jugs and violets placed in corners. Follow a corner to its logical conclusion and you will find mama in a broken flower pot spilling indigo... (209)

It is as if she can now see that her mother is at every supporting corner in her thought, seemingly domestic and inconsequential, but at every "logical conclusion." The intertextual reference to Babel suggests that the separation of languages has a mythic inevitability, but for now Hermione is addressing her fantasy of fusion with her mother, her desire for "the same vocabulary" with its sensual rhythmic repetitions of "mama of course . . . violets . . . mama . . . violets . . ." while simultaneously refusing the company of her actual mother. And she takes pleasure in this imaginative act with Hamshem because she is playing with language *about* her mother, playing at a distance from the mother.

Now that she is no longer a part of Eugenia/Pennsylvania, now that she can see the forest for the trees, Her Gart enjoys the metaphoric replacement for her mother. She can love the language of "mama of course" because her mother has become metonymically displaced. Hermione imagines *her*, "in a broken flower pot spilling indigo." Rather than an omnipotent mother, Eugenia is represented by a series of domesticated plants, with the last "container" spilling its contents. That is, Eugenia as an omnipotent container has been broken open.⁴³ This image suggests that Hermione has finally come to recognize that ". . . the mother as mother is lost forever, that the mother as womb, homeland, source and grounding for the subject is

⁴³Jane Gallop describes a similar recognition of the mother being penetrated by the world. In *Reading Lacan* she describes the common conception of language's purity as indicated by the notion of contamination of "a pure mother-tongue." Gallop calls this notion of a pure language a trace of the preoedipal fantasy, since, in fact, the "child is actually unable to command, to possess either mother or language" (50).

irretrievably past" (Gallop, *RL*, 148). Her employment of various images to speak for her mother, her repetitive search for "the thing back of the thing" can now be read as

... the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized. . . . (*KR*, 161)

Since this relationship "cannot be localized," it is no wonder Hermione always feels that no language is quite adequate to account for this "lost territory":

Nothing could bring the thing back, no words could make the thing solid and visible and therefore to be coped with. Solid and visible form was what she had been seeking. (213)

"No words could make the thing solid and visible" because Hermione is trying to talk about a relationship that precedes language. Because it precedes form, it cannot "be coped with." Yet while she nostalgically laments the loss of this original ground,⁴⁴ the lament itself becomes a language of coping, a formal articulation of "the thing behind the thing that mattered."

Nurse Dennon/Hamshem becomes the analyst who, like a psychoanalyst, "returns to the subject what the subject was saying so that the subject can recognize it and stop saying it" (*RL*, 109). Hermione believes the nurse will name the unnameable and this conviction enables her to speak, enables her to know what she has only anticipated knowing. For example, she decides,

I will put this into visible language, Amy Dennon will say this or this. Amy Dennon will say you were harassed, disintegrated and disassociated by preliminary erotic longings, wakened, as it were in sleep. . . . In a dream there had been a dream and it was the very valiant

⁴⁴Nostalgia here has the various connotations of "'melancholy regret' that something is over, something one has not experienced" (*RL*, 148). That is, not only has Her Gart "lost" her mother, she also has not experienced her, since the "I" who would know of experience was not yet constituted at the time. The preoedipal stage is anterior to the perception of loss.

avid mind of Her that had started across trackless pathways to entrap it.
(213)

Hermione anticipates a response to what she has not said yet and this imagined future response will historically contextualize the point to which she has not yet come. The narrator "zooms in" to the first-person speech at this moment of proleptic reflection, to show how Hermione psychically operates in the same way as does the narrative about her. As in the prolepsis of Lacan's famous "mirror stage,"

"... the self is constituted through anticipating what it will become, and then this anticipatory model is used for gauging what was before" (*RL*, 81).

Nurse Dennon as a person has very little to do with this complicated process, because of course she does not have the language Hermione ascribes to her. What is important here is what Hermione imagines, the way she constitutes herself in her relationship to this figure.

You call your doll or your toy dog by a name and it becomes *your* dog, your toy doll. Nurse Dennon became by the same token her very own Ham, Shem and Japheth. It was some sort of figure set in a frigid temple, where people would tear their hearts out and it would never listen. Yet if you happened to know its name was Ham, Shem and Japheth it would do anything for you. (200)

Hermione has made manifest in this icon her desire to contact her unapproachable mother "who would never listen," made manifest her desire to possess this "figure set in a frigid temple." In fact, through the image in language, through an act of cognition, she has come to own, if not her mother, her knowledge and experience of this relationship to the mother.

Hermione's discourse is a sort of associative rambling, stopping and starting in a staccato rhythm "across trackless pathways" of gaps and digressions. After two hundred pages of stuttering and interruptions and the narrator having to account for what "Hermione couldn't then know," Her Gart says *I* in lengthy utterances textually

marked off as separate or contained by quotation marks, as if the narrator can step back and let Her speak for herself. She laments the inadequacy of language to account for "HER" but is nevertheless able "through the very practice of language, to conceive of what is unconceivable outside of language" (Brossard, 98). Lines from Swinburne interweave with Biblical allusion, Greek mythology and a reworking of the phrases previously spoken by lovers and family so that Hermione's peculiar "practice of language" becomes her way of speaking for or "authoring" herself. She repeatedly recalls the line from Swinburne, which she has re-written slightly to suit herself, "O sister my sister, O fleet sweet swallow, the world's division divideth us," thinks a little further to "things were in people, people were in things," then calls out to "Hamsheem" (204).

The lines from Swinburne seem to indicate a recognition of her separateness even while she addresses her desire for fusion, so that the narrative of her "illness" reads like a conscious speech about what has hitherto only been unconsciously reenacted.⁴⁵ In her previous relationships, Hermione sought to literally reunite with "the part of herself that was forever missing," but by this point in the novel she seems instead to acknowledge the metonymic nature of her desire, as well as the psychological necessity that "the world's division divideth us." The narrator is therefore less obtrusive because Hermione seems able to tolerate her ambivalent desires for "oneness" with her mother as well as her simultaneous need to separate.

Hermione recalls speaking with Fayne Rabb and saying

People like you and me here in the Etats Unis, growing up, not growing up, part of the nebula, maybe in Alabama, maybe in Georgia,

⁴⁵"A desire must insistently repeat itself until it be recognized. . . . Thus repetition, that basic fact of psychoanalysis which Freud attempted to puzzle out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is the effect not so much of the frustration of a desire but of the lack of recognition of a desire."(Gallop, *RL*, 104)

. . . We are deracinated Europeans holding valiant intellectual standards. . . . I mean holding something against something. Someone will name the something. Germans name it. (218)

Her time with Hamshem offers her a discourse which makes sense of her earlier speech; in this case she recognizes the contradiction of anyone being in "united states." She recalls the earlier insight that a "united" state involves being uprooted from elsewhere, perhaps an elsewhere that Germans with their language for "disassociation, etc" will name, an elsewhere she has since found by her own naming of Hamshem. (And her use of a foreign language to account for these "Etats Unis" emphasizes the new consciousness of having lost an antediluvian "single language."⁴⁶) She holds to this imaginary place of roots, of the single language preceding "the world's division" from her own version of "Genesis." Then from an American scene she casts further back in time to the "thing behind the thing that mattered" and imagines herself as Pheidippides running with a message, imagines herself urging another part of herself forward. Or rather, she recognizes a split, that part of herself, perhaps the unconscious, is struggling from the "ancient" world with a message for the part residing in this world.

The narrative act of casting back and recovering from the past some treasure that needs to be addressed in the present makes for an endless return and refashioning of her own history. Hermione seems aware of the split quality of experience, aware that she can only know what she is doing in retrospect. Or, as Jonathan Culler has said of experience in light of reading, "'experience' is divided and deferred—already behind us as something to be recovered, yet still before us as something to be produced" (Culler, 82). Her Gatt analyzes the relationships that are "already behind"

⁴⁶Also, Ham and Shem were to found Asia and Africa. Hermione's focus on them is a focus on a foreign language forebearer, eliding Japheth, the closer European relation.

and knows now that "it was to disguise himself that George would so disguise [her]" (219). And she can see Fayne's role in her life too:

...run, run, run Hermione. For the message-bearer next in line has turned against you....dead or forgotten. . . . You have a double burden...run, run Hermione, run for yourself and Fayne Rabb. (220)

It is only after "the message-bearer next in line has turned against" her that she can create a fictional construct about that event or that she can confer significance upon it. Hermione, and perhaps H.D. as well, might have agreed with Althusser that "experience is opaque and can become knowledge only when worked on, transformed by and sited within a conceptual system" (Lapsley & Westlake, 4).

Hermione's talk, both her conversation with Amy Dennon and her imagined speeches, is what transforms the opacity of her experience into knowledge. She thinks "tell the *Lacadaemonians* that we lie here" (emphasis mine, 221), continuing to play with the laconic nurse's position as "the subject presumed to know" about her "double burden." In light of my earlier discussion regarding the sister as surrogate mother, this "double burden" reads doubly: Hermione believes that Fayne "won't accept her greatness" in the same way she believes her mother is an artist who never came to fruition. She feels the responsibility of "running" for herself and for Fayne, which parallels the way she feels as a daughter who sees her mother's creativity thwarted by domesticity. As Hermione's newly found speech transforms her earlier "experience" of speechlessness, so too does H.D. create her history by writing it; and so too the reader has to speak in order to make "sense" of her textual experience.

By *imagining* Eugenia a poet (and H.D.'s other texts also develop the matrilineal origins for her "gift") Hermione "reparents" herself in fantasy which allows her entry into her own creative work. This gesture is described by Rachel Blau Duplessis as the way a female artist can "[loop] back and reenact[] childhood ties, to achieve not the culturally approved ending in heterosexual romance, but rather the

reparenting necessary to her second birth as an artist" (in King, 94). Instead of becoming Eugenia's mirror image through the role of wife and mother that Eugenia would choose for her daughter, Hermione chooses her writing as "the filial completion of a thwarted parent's task." That is, the *fiction* of her mother as artist grants her the artistic license she needs; in fact, her belief in a maternal source for her art compels her forward.⁴⁷ This rewriting of the maternal figure obviously engaged H.D. on a biographical level and may be, as DuPlessis argues about other writers,

compensatory for her losses (which may themselves be imaginatively heightened by being remembered by her child.) The daughter becomes an artist to extend, reveal, and elaborate her mother's often thwarted talents. (in King, 93)

Rewriting an artist mother is "compensatory for her losses," particularly since "loss" here suggests such a dense knot of biography, fiction, and narrative experiment.

H.D.'s mother died in the year prior to the writing of *HER*. But to suggest this death as the key to this roman à clef would only impose yet another unified code—it would put an end to reading and re-reading, since one's "experience" of this text, like the "experience" of one's mother, can scarcely coincide with the language with which one can account for that experience. Nonetheless, knowledge of Helen Wolle's death does contribute to the sense of maternal loss and absence in the novel—not so much as trope but in the forward/backward reworkings of that loss. Deborah Kloepfer describes such a relationship when she discusses Jean Rhys; while the parallel to H.D.

⁴⁷This necessary fiction of the mother as artist is also very compelling to readers who are caught up within the daughterly fiction. Friedman, for example, writes that Eugenia is a victim of patriarchal culture and therefore "insecure and self-denigrating about her own considerable gifts (*PR*, 140). And Barbara Guest is so thoroughly caught up with the fusion/confusion of identities that she criticizes H.D. for not responding in "real life" the way Guest thinks Hermione feels about Eugenia. Guest refers to Freud's analysis of H.D.'s maternal attachment, then ponders: ". . . it is curious that when [H.D.] did have her mother to herself, a feeling of claustrophobia would come over her . . . H.D. could see herself as homeless even when surrounded by the *comforting presence of her real mother*" (my italics, 147).

is not identical, there are nevertheless interesting correspondences. Kloepfer writes that a sense of loss surfaces in the text, resulting from

not only the mother's death, but her failure and the ways in which the child takes that failure upon herself. Despite the mother's distance and austerity, her unsympathetic demands, it is the act of incurring her anger, failing *her*, that leads textually—and psychologically—to her absence. (*UM*, 76)

While Eugenia is not exactly "austere," it is the ways in which Hermione takes on her failure in her self and then fears failing "*Her*" that keeps H.D. interested in this ground. Because who fails whom? and how does this matter to the daughter/artist in this *kunstlerroman*?

The result at the end of the book is far from the artistic figure usually prominent in the male modernist tradition. Rather than ". . . exile, alienation and refusal of social roles—the *non-serviam* of the classic hero Stephen Dedalus" (*Duplessis*, *CS*, 101), H.D.'s young artist remains immersed in the life situation she is struggling to change. Hermione plays with heroic fantasies of solitude, feels that "the message-bearer next in line has turned against [her]" but these are not ". . . fantasies of social untouchability or superiority that are prevalent in modernist depictions" (*Duplessis*, 101). Hermione has to negotiate her way within the confines of her present situation, which is still Gart.

Running like Pheidippides, "she realized she liked her feet" (221) and when she leaves the sick room her feet take her right into the Farrand forest. That is, she "finds" herself, with her newly-found voice *and* feet, in the place her mother had once enjoined her to not consider. Earlier, when she was still subject to her mother, she had thought "The Farrand forest was sealed in consciousness...in the Farrand forest was sacrifice, was redemption" (115). Now, she performs the sacrifice which redeems her. She transgresses, with her body, her mother's law, and enters what she was once unable to think.

A form followed her, dogged her through the winter birches. It followed her feet, it stopped when she stopped. . . . Her feet went on making the path. Her feet were pencils tracing a path through a forest. The world had been razed, had been made clear for this thing. (223)

The form she has been searching for appears in the traces left by her feet. The thing she had anticipated is seen to be following her, while the narrative form traces its way "through digression and contradiction, toward something that does not resemble a conclusion" (Hirsch, 117)⁴⁸

After such an unsettling process of knowing and not knowing, of desire meeting with taboo, what Hermione realizes is not some "kernel of true self" or as one critic argues, the transcendence of ". . . alienation, developing a new form of self-constitution which includes the semiotic, and, especially, another woman" (S. Travis, "A Crack in the Ice," 137). Rather, "transcendence" is exactly what is called into question. The knowledge she discovers in the forest which had been "sealed in consciousness" is a kind of retroactive insight into what she could not know then. That is, the path her feet make can only be seen when she looks back at where she has left.

Hermione steps out onto barely frozen ice and knows that the moment is a nexus of irresolvable tensions. She is "part of next year, part of last year" (224); if she moves forward she will break through the ice but behind her the bank is too high to go back the way she came. It is a moment of sustained ambivalence, suggested by the image which is not quite frozen. "It never freezes properly. There's always water running." Hermione knows that nothing can "entrap the thing", that no language can adequately fix perception; so when Jim Farrand finds her and says "I didn't know you were here," she answers "I'm not, strictly speaking." Here again the narrator is

⁴⁸ This is Hirsch's description of the style of *A Room of One's Own* but I think it applies very well to the the narrative logic employed by H.D.

also playing with the impossibility of "strictly speaking" because H.D.'s narrative *does* what it is about, circles around to keep the inevitable at bay even while "things came unhinged."

At the conclusion of the narrator's retrospect of "her" the reader realizes that this reflection on the past is an activity of the perpetual present, that "'[W]hen all is said and done': all is never said and done; 'no consequential word can be posed (which would transform it, fatally, into a past)'" (*RL*, 46). And the reader is implicated at every point in this struggle between "strictly speaking" and delirium, between fixing the text's meaning, freezing it "fatally, into a past," or holding the tension of the present moment. We stop reading through our efforts to speak about the novel, knowing full well that "there's always water running" which, in this novel, is the memory of an always elsewhere maternal and subterranean current.

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