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## Contained in Her: the Latent Volcano within Emily Dickinson and H.D.

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“Contained in Her: the Latent Volcano within Emily Dickinson and H.D.”

The image of a volcano is something that nearly every individual on earth can identify. These tall, conical hills both awe and devastate the human race. Volcanoes are built around a vent that connects with reservoirs of thick, molten rock and gas. Centered on a vent, the mounting pressure created by the gases ultimately forces this rock upward until it ultimately breaks through the weaker cracks in the Earth's surface. From here, any amount of devastation may occur. The mildest eruptions are comprised of hot steam that bursts from the surface. The most dangerous involve violent explosions that blast enormous clouds of gas-laden debris, lava bombs, and tephra (airborne ash and dust) into the atmosphere up to tens of miles in the air. Although these are the most commonly associated forms of destruction, they are the least deadly; often, lava moves so slowly that humans can easily evade it. More devastation is caused by the less noticed effects of the eruption. Because they are often situated on or around the boundaries of tectonic plates, earthquakes are often the warning signs of an eruption, causing unstable soil and fast-moving landslides. The most deadly are the superheated clouds of ash and hot gas that move through the air with hurricane speed. These gases and debris can affect downwind areas up to hundreds of miles away. In 1902, gases such as these killed all but two of the 29,000 citizens of St. Pierre, the capital of Martinique. What is perhaps the most devastating, however, is not the loss of lives but the destruction of villages, farmland and other resources that fall within the lava's path. Despite this, volcanoes are double-natured; they both destroy and create. Volcanic soil is rich with necessary nutrients such as potassium. Furthermore, the byproducts of volcanic rock are constantly used for construction and other products.

Despite the fertile aftermath of the eruption, when volcanoes are used as metaphor in literature, most readers examine the volcano through its destructive power, rather than its creative one. It is a container for destruction. The lava inside builds up under pressure and eventually explodes, destroying or at least greatly changing its surrounding landscape. The thick walls, which appear smooth and harmless on the outside, guard the churning force underneath. Thus, the volcano may be read as a sort of safe zone for the writer. Like the walls, the writer may present a smooth, amicable outward appearance, one not suffering from the limitations of sex, mental illness, or any other private issue which may create a more disturbing image of the writer.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, then, there is a tension between what the writer wishes to show to the outside world and the intelligent passion and voice that she holds inside her. Focusing on the sublime, the reader of this image expects that the powerful and capable individual will eventually “erupt,” overpower whatever is forcing him/her into volcanic containment, and destroy the surrounding areas through a rewriting of social expectations.

Adrienne Rich, in her essay, “Vesuvius at Home,” is one of the leading proponents of this image; following its publication, her reading of Dickinson as an explosive and powerful volcano has been one of the most widely used. Rich acknowledges that the split existence between inward and outward that the volcano projects is an extremely dangerous and difficult one. Yet, she notes that Emily Dickinson defied this existence, instead “enter[ing], through language, states which most people veil or deny with silence” (8). Rather than explore a physical outside world, Dickinson instead breaks barriers and defies through her exploration of death, sexuality, and other taboo subjects. This is her explosion. These apt explorations are the destruction that she reaps upon the outside public world.

Yet, Rich arguably does not account for the volcanic imagery of Dickinson's poetry instead focusing on the witty, articulate woman that Dickinson projects through her letters or through subjects not normally examined by women. She examines the destruction that the volcano may wreak, but not necessarily the volcano that Dickinson presents—each volcano she writes about is latent, promising destruction but never actually following through. This image is an entirely different one than the feminist tour-de-force that we expect from a poet such as Dickinson. A latent volcano can only foreshadow destruction; destruction doesn't necessarily follow it. The dormant volcano may also be read as a sterile image; without any lava flow, the soil and nearby environs remain unchanged and undisturbed. Because of its unchanging nature, the surrounding area is then sterile; there is no growth or expansion. By focusing inward, the writer may not grow or produce in any prolific way. Changing the outward shell—"bursting forth," so to speak—is the only way to show the more powerful, inner self to the outside world. By not actually exploding, the latent volcano is instead a comment on the containment of the writer, either choosing not to display her power, or incarcerated by the more dominant society around her.

Dickinson is not the only highly regarded feminist icon to utilize this image. The volcano also occurs frequently throughout the work of H.D., a modernist poet born nearly a hundred years after Dickinson. Like Dickinson's, H.D.'s volcanoes also fail to erupt spectacularly. Instead, H.D. utilizes them as an image of inwardness and imposed imprisonment by those around her. Using volcanoes, both Dickinson and HD present a desire to project the inward self rather than the outer, more demure one; however, this is something that neither of them are able to accomplish, offering neither solutions in writing nor in their own lives. They remain latent. However, while Dickinson identifies that her inner self is contained and acknowledges the

tension, she rarely gives sign that it is problematic to her. Her latent volcanoes are somewhat content. H.D., on the other hand, consistently identifies her rejection of this concept and its negative effects on her.

Physically, Emily Dickinson was a slight and quiet woman, one who hid her face from the public eye so much that she became “The Myth of Amherst.” The volcanic imagery that occurs so frequently within her poems at once expresses both a potential tour-de-force of feminine power and the limitations that subjugate it. These volcanoes also indicate a desire to break free; yet, Dickinson’s volcanoes never erupt. Instead, the inner force remains locked inside (perhaps of its own volition). The writer or speaker is caught between what they project to the rest of the world (or are forced to project because of outside, more dominant forces) and internal feelings (which may be completely at odds with those externally expressed). Because the two feelings are in opposition, the individual maintains a constant struggle with the desire to express both. This creates more tension inside than could occur should that force break forth.

Dickinson’s poem “A still—Volcano—Life” depicts a volcano whose destruction, if such a word can be used, is slow and subtle:

A still—Volcano—Life  
That flickered in the night—  
When it was dark to do  
Without erasing sight—

A quiet—Earthquake style—  
Too subtle to suspect  
By natures this side Naples—  
The North cannot detect

The solemn—Torrid—Symbol  
The lips that never lie—  
Whose hissing Corrals part—and shut—  
And Cities—ooze-away

“A Still—Volcano—Life—” sets up this sense of a discrepancy between unquiet inwardness and a reticent outward appearance. The volcano here is equally conflicted, which Dickinson depicts in the juxtapositions between “still—Volcano,” (1) “quiet—Earthquake” (5), and “solemn—Torrid” (9). In each of these phrases, there is a sharp contrast between a quiet, harmless image (still/quiet/solemn) and one more typically violent (Volcano/Earthquake/torrid). If one views the speaker as this volcano, she is caught between these two means of expression. The first stanza is also completely in past tense. Because it indicates one of the brief displays of power, it tells us that “flicker” is not continued. It has already tried this meager display of power and has already found it undesirable. Dickinson also expresses a disinclination to utilize the destructive power that the volcano can bring. The lines “lips [that] never lie—” (10) are suggestive of linguistics; Dickinson’s speaker’s power lies in the power of her words. They are mentioned in the same stanza as the only deliberate act of destruction, oozing. Because they “part—and shut—” (11) and the volcano also only flickers when it will not “(erase) sight” (4), Dickinson indicates the speaker’s reluctance to use that linguistic power. The “Cities” (12) that are slowly destroyed at the end of the poem are also, like language and belief systems, artificially constructed; they exist only because society views them as existent. Thus, the speaker’s linguistic power, her lava, has the potential to destroy the “Cities.”<sup>2</sup> If she erupts and destroys them, she has the ability to reshape our notion of literature and meaning.

Dickinson’s “earthquake style,” on the other hand, is an imposing force that is always looming but is never quite at the harming point. It is allusive to the beginnings of any volcanic eruption; quakes are typically the warning sign that indicates a shifting of the plates. Those who are indigenous to the volcanic area are used to these disruptions and ignore them because they

are more subtle than the more blatantly destructive eruptions. Earthquakes are also suggestive of a great deal of tension, alluding to the friction between the plates of the earth as well as a friction between the less expressive inward self and the more potentially destructive outward one. Being in constant opposition, it is difficult—if not impossible—to maintain both. The earthquake also suggests that Dickinson is ready to expose her inner volcanic core at any time, and her contemporaries are completely unaware of her impending unleashing.

The speaker also mentions that the earthquake style is something that “The North cannot detect” (8). The last word in this phrase, detect, implies some sort of agency. Someone is watching Dickinson. Or, if the North is not a person, but a compass or other tool, there is still an individual behind it, perpetually looking. If Dickinson’s speaker is hoping to avoid detection by some sort of Northern person then one may safely assume that she believes her actions watched and judged by some sort of outside onlooker. This is even more suggestive of an anxiety of the speaker. Not only may there be an inner desire to maintain an outward quietness, the speaker may also be forced into depicting this self. She may also merely be fearful of presenting this self to the onlooker because of the reaction that could occur.

This volcano, like many of the others examined in this paper, never completely rises to the destructive nature that a volcano portends. Instead, Dickinson merely gives us glimpses with her flickering and oozing; it is as if she only briefly shows an inner, more chaotic persona, causes a sensation, and then quickly reassumes a more reticent, less belligerent outward persona. In her analysis of this poem, Freitas also notes that Dickinson’s volcano remains a dormant rather than an explosive force; however, she does not read this as a negative thing. Rather, Freitas says that instead, Dickinson works through tiny “implosions” (2), testing walls that shelter her from immortality or self-destruction. Indeed, she claims that this creates a tension both within the

poetry and Dickinson herself that the poem thrives on. Inward is the “best poetic locus” and through the inner focused, implosive self, she is able to mature and grow. This is true to a point. However, the “implosions” (2) that Freitas expresses aren’t present in this text; Dickinson describes a slow, leaking out of her lava and a small flicker of light—a tentative mood towards destruction and power—but she never mentions any violence, inward or out. She is not implosive at all, but subtle and discreet, promising more destruction than she actually doles out.

“I have never seen ‘Volcanoes’—” examines the rarity of destruction in volcanoes. When one examines the poem keeping in mind that the volcano may symbolize a writer, or of its inner core symbolizing the power of language itself, then one can also examine tension between maintaining differing outward and inward personas:

I have never seen ‘Volcanoes’—  
But, when Travellers tell  
How those old—phlegmatic mountains  
Usually so still—

Bear within—appalling Ordnance,  
Fire, smoke, and gun—  
Taking Villages for breakfast,  
And appalling Men—

If the stillness is Volcanic  
In the human face  
Where upon a pain Titantic—  
Features keep their place—

If at length, the smouldering anguish  
Will not overcome,  
And the palpitating Vineyard  
In the dust, be thrown?

If some loving Antiquary,  
On Resumption Morn,  
Will not cry with joy, “Pompeii”!  
To the Hills return!

The first line implies that the volcanoes themselves—the poets trapped within the volcano—are never actually seen or experienced, at least by the speaker. Thus, this speaker comments on the inwardly focused nature of the writer/volcano. Although the speaker has never seen this herself, there have been plenty of individuals who have told her about it, as suggested by the pluralization of “Travellers.” “Travellers” also indicates a sense of motion; these individuals go back and forth, possibly from the inward to the outward themselves. The fact that they “Tell,” however, indicates that either way, they are only relaying a story rather than fact. The knowledge of a more conflicted, inner self is only a myth; there are no facts to support it other than hearsay and stories.

The fact that they are relayed by multiple individuals indicates that conflicting inward/outward issue may be common among other individuals; rather than being a comment on Dickinson’s writing, it is a comment on all writers in general. It is preferable to discern between one nature and the other and to hide one away. To the outside viewer, the writers may maintain themselves safely from a public eye. Thus, stillness may be seen as synonymous with “volcanic” in the third stanza, rather than the devastating nature usually associated with it. Because the self of the poet is safely reticent within the seclusion of the body—the volcano walls—it is unable to display the “pain Titanic” (11) that may actually be going on within. Should a writer be experiencing anxiety or mental fatigue or any other malady, the writer may assume a still outwardness that never indicates these issues. Furthermore, assuming the speaker is female, she may not be able to show the pain. Hence, she is shut away inside. Thus, Dickinson may speak of the writer having an “appalling Ordnance” (5) (and the ability to take both “Villages” (7) and “appalling Men” (8) for her meal.<sup>3</sup> We may get a clear picture of it, but we do not experience it anywhere but on the page.

Although the inner self may only be a myth to the outside, the speaker recognizes a desire to express it more fully, particularly within the third stanza. She hopes that the “smouldering anguish” will “overcome” (13). That is, the emotion and possible anger at containment that the poet longs to show overcomes the hard shell that she is hiding behind. In the same stanza, the speaker also notes the need to throw “the palpitating Vineyard / in the dust” (15). “Palpitating” may pertain to the overtly feminine, as “palpitations” were a common diagnosis for any of the more “feminine” ailments, such as fainting or hysteria. As the vineyard would no doubt be close to the fertile volcanic soil, it is close by to the speaker. Furthermore, she desires to cast it in the “dust,” a word that may be associated with the old and phlegmatic mountains in the earlier stanzas. One can infer then that the vineyards are some sort female stereotype, which the writer, hoping to maintain peace, may display outwardly but inwardly detests.

Ultimately, however, the volcano still remains reductive. Early on, the speaker identifies the volcanoes as “old—phlegmatic” (3), indicating a sterility and sickness within those who fail to erupt. Furthermore, these volcanoes “bear” (5) their appalling insides; it becomes a burden to contain their churning masses. Each of the actions in the second stanza also contains a sense of agency that is lost in the rest of the poem; she demands to “overcome” (12) the “smouldering anguish” (13), she demands that the “Vineyard” (14) be “thrown” (15) and she demands that the “loving Antiquary” (17) cry out “Pompeii”(17). The speaker is forceful almost to the point of being brutish; only if her conditions are met can she continue being in public. The speaker longs for the power that the release of lava brings, but remains terrified of public opinion—only if she also receives the hailing from the public (shouted as if in celebration of her return), the “Antiquarians,” will she continue with her eruption. However, should she not be met with the anticipated response, she will return to isolation again, leaving the possibility of fertility and

change that an explosion typically promises unrealized. Although the speaker may want to explode and express the inward self to the world, she does not or cannot, thus creating a tension between what she desires to do and what she fails to do . She can only run to “the Hills” (20), back inward.

“On my Volcano grows the Grass” may also carry the idea of the latent volcano over:

On my volcano grows the Grass  
A meditative spot—  
An acre for a Bird to choose  
Would be the general thought—

How red the Fire rocks below  
How insecure the sod  
Did I disclose  
Would populate with awe my solitude

Dickinson divides the poem into two stanzas, the first dealing with her outer, public self—the quiet, “meditative” volcano, a perfect woman rather than one indulging in mad scribblings. Dickinson’s use of a possessive attached to the volcano in this first line denotes that this self is singularly hers—her person and her choice of display. Despite the volcano lacking a sense of agency in the first part, the other character mentioned, the Bird, chooses his place and stakes a claim on the volcano’s land. Demure and letting another figure (possibly male) choose for her is how society would have a female individual; it is the “general thought” (4). It should be noted that Dickinson qualifies this statement with “would” (4). Although society may be inclined to let the bird pick and choose his pieces, she may not be.<sup>4</sup> Despite showing a demure, subdued behavior, however, Dickinson mentions that her creativity is not in any way limited. She notes the grass that grows around her, which perhaps symbolizes the fertility of her creative mind.

The second stanza modifies the first's claim of reticence and modesty, noting the volcano's latent power that dwells within the "Fire rocks" (4). Although fire is possibly used as an adjective here, it is still capitalized, noting that it is every bit as important as the earlier "Bird." This stanza reinforces the previous lack of agency. It is not that the speaker's person cannot erupt; it merely chooses when and where it may. Hence, the soil around her is "insecure" (5)—her outward appearance is only a fragile construction that she may take away with her choosing. She is apt to burst forth any time, and should she show it, the results would be powerful. If the populace even knew of the creative talent and spark that lies beneath, Dickinson claims, then they would be immobilized with admiration.

Yet, despite the power that Dickinson's speaker claims she holds and the agency that she has in displaying it, one has to wonder why she retains her quiet public persona. Despite her adamant claims that she has the real power, her outward self remains a performance of feminine dignity. The destruction that she promises through "red Fire" (5) is met with a conditional "Did I" (8), thus rendering the claim of destruction less consequential. Although the speaker claims that she could devastate with her churning inwardness, we never see her follow through on her words. Why, if her private self is so enigmatic that it would send any doubter into reverence, would she close it off? Alternatively, if by "Did I disclose / would populate with awe my solitude" (8) Dickinson means that her private self is so powerful that the general public is unable to believe that she could contain it, why does she? This latter reading of the last two lines seems rather unconvincing, given the way Dickinson breaks them up. Although the poem is written in hymn meter, the traditional eight syllable/ six syllable construction begins to fall apart here. Dickinson retains her 14 syllable count, yet distributes it instead in a four syllable/ ten syllable construction. This sudden break down suggests instability in her claim. Here,

Dickinson's speaker may not be so sure that she would disclose her power to the world. This line break is also key to the last line. If one looks at it on the surface, it allows the poem to mirror the last lines of the stanzas (Would be the general thought / ...Would populate with awe my solitude). However, this comparison allows the last line to undermine the first, suggesting that Dickinson's speaker has none of the bravado she claims. Both lines begin with *would*; this is something that should or could happen but does not. The end to the first stanza suggests agency and power; although one should stake claim to her acre, she does not allow it. It does not happen. At the same time, her disclosure and awe that she wishes to produce also does not happen. It should and could, but it won't.

This latency issue is also important in "Volcanoes be in Sicily." Dickinson's speaker immediately associates herself with some sort of volcanic image, noting that a volcano is nearer to her location than the more exotic and eruptive Sicilian and South American volcanoes:

Volcanoes be in Sicily  
And South America  
I judge from my Geography  
Volcano nearer here  
A Lava step at any time  
Am I inclined to climb  
A Crater I may contemplate  
Vesuvius at Home

By claiming that the "Geography" (3) is her own in the first stanza, the speaker asserts that every claim or assumption made in this poem is her own; it is her perception of it. Thus, this is how she views herself—not necessarily how the world may view her. They might not judge her as having the potential for a tormented or passionate inner self. The rest of the poem devolves into conditionals, losing agency just like the earlier poem. Volcanic, she is "inclined"

(6) to climb a “lava step” (7) or a vast “crater” (8). While these signify the inside of a volcano and, like the earlier poems’ mentions of the inner volcano, are disposed to a powerful and passionate nature, they are also indicative of immense spaces that the speaker must go through to break out of the walls. She is still inside the volcanic space, facing no public but herself. Furthermore, although Dickinson says that she is “inclined” (6) to take this step and “may contemplate” (8) her crater, these are not necessarily indicative of any sense of agency. Dickinson is either toying with the idea, choosing to act on whim, or she needs permission; the words “am” and “may” imply that there are conditions to be met. Furthermore, her insistence that she could do any of these things at “any time” (5) seems a little too insistent, especially since she gives the reader no proof or reason that she will actually act. Finally, the poem is condensed into one stanza—as opposed to the quatrains that characterize most of the other volcano poems. Dickinson literally does not break out here, even in print. The walls of word remain tightly enclosed around her.

The last lines of this poem, characterized by “am(s)” and “may(s),” are indeterminate, perhaps evoking Dickinson’s own ambivalence towards the situation. Does she, as a female and a writer, possess the ability to project (either through writing or a face-to-face interaction) the more fiery inwardness? Or, especially as a female and writer (and therefore other), does she wait for the permission of an outside force, whether it be society’s approval or her own family’s? In any case, the lack of definite action suggests that something is holding her back, be it her own anxieties or an outside power. The last line, “Vesuvius at Home” (8), indicates that there is a battle going on within her own house, but whether it is Dickinson’s clashes with the rest of her family, or Dickinson battling her own anxieties, is undecided. Either way, yet another reading of

the line, that Dickinson is only the wrathful and passionate Vesuvius at home, coincides with both of these ideas.

Although Dickinson writes about and expresses an anxiety and a tension between whether or not to project the inward self rather than the outer one, she does not necessarily act on that tension. Each of these poems expresses a potential to erupt or burst out of the volcanic shell, but that is where it remains. Dickinson's speakers "ooze" and "flicker," but they never unleash their true destructive selves on the world. They express a desire and potential, but never rise to it. Dickinson merely outlines the problem; she does not suggest or she may not know any solution to this problem. This indeterminate, unrealized end suggests that Dickinson may not have rid herself of this anxiety or tension. Instead, it is an act that always accompanies writing and is rarely escapable.

Like Dickinson, H.D. utilizes volcanic imagery within her prose and her poetry. The few readings on it, like those on Dickinson, remark on its destructive force rather than its latency, examining its palimpsestic relationship with the World Wars that H.D. underwent. They do not note, however, the fact that H.D.'s volcanoes also never actively erupt. In the two pieces of prose examined in this paper, *Asphodel* and *HERmione*, H.D. only references the volcanic image when in the midst of a crisis, whether it be conflicted desire to marry George Lowndes, conflicting feelings toward her husband, or any other conflicting desires. Each of these conflicts represents Hermione caught between multiple desires, whether they be to comply with society's desires (and maintain the outward self) or to completely contradict them (thus being more radical and inward). In these sections, the character Hermione retreats (sometimes literally going into the image of the volcano); she gives the reader a view of the inner chaos that is not necessarily expressed outwardly to other characters. Her own intimate, inward person is constantly at war,

frantically like “a wild bird caught in bird-lime” (114), yet Hermione never works to project it. Hermione’s inner personality is kept completely private; her sought independence, ability to articulate, and radical thoughts are only known to Hermione, and of course, the omnipresent reader. Because they show up at many of these critical points, one can read the volcano in a similar way that one reads Dickinson’s, representing a struggle and tension between the inner and outer persona. Unlike Dickinson, however, H.D. views the volcanic as an incarcerating experience, the struggle between what she would be and what she is, which traps her inward self instead of preserving it. That is, where Dickinson chooses her volcano, H.D. does not. Thus, she struggles to reject it (and the image of the volcano as well). Hermione’s volcanoes are equally harmless. She remains dependent on the more dominant personalities of others and continues to hide her troubled, inward self.

*Asphodel*, like its prequel *Hermione*, is a thinly disguised roman-a-clef which deals with H.D.’s life throughout World War I. H.D. did not live to see it published, despite the fact that it was written around 1921 and H.D. lived to 1961. This may indicate that this crisis of self was not one that H.D. wanted to display and an altogether different representation of the anxiety between inward and out. In *Asphodel*, Hermione (H.D.) continually sorts out her feelings and the nature of her relationship to George Lowndes (Ezra Pound). Although this is a theme that occurs throughout the entire novel, it is more prominently figured during the first half. In this section, Hermione becomes aware of the tension between her selves as well as its suffocating nature. Following her kiss with Lowndes (despite being involved with separate people and having broken off their engagement years ago), Hermione toys with the idea of marrying George. Suddenly, the idea of her being married to Lowndes becomes terrible—“You couldn’t of course marry him....Hybiscus red and...famished hyacinths” (75). George Lowndes has been a more

dominant personality than Hermione throughout the course of this novel; he has always been a more dominant personality throughout her life. Hermione realizes that by attaching herself to him, she will be perpetually attaching herself to the associations and persona that *he* attaches to *her*. Furthermore, this section clearly has Hermione's personalities split; she addresses herself in the second person, acknowledging that there is a conflict inside her between the outward, easy notion of marrying Lowndes and the inward one that resists it at all costs. Hermione begins to break down, struggling with what she should do—"to say yes, no. To say, no. To say, yes. Don't marry him" (75).

Hermione also comments, "A volcanic rock shriveled, open, cracked, fell and hyacinths were about her, shriveled" (75). Here, however, the volcanic represents incarceration rather than a chosen safehouse. Lowndes' dominations overshadow Hermione's own personality, thus taking on the image of the volcanic walls that trap a force within. When Hermione makes the decision to say no, she breaks open the volcanic walls that have held her. This turn of events is shown by the white space break in the paragraph, a rare thing since H.D.'s paragraphs are so long. The white space in this break, larger than most breaks in the novel, visibly represents a shift. Hermione breaks away from the feelings and attachments towards Lowndes that imprison her. Hence, the volcano breaks and "she had risen from Hell as Persephone from the underworld" (75). Hermione rises from her imprisonment.

Although this may be perceived as an explosion, it has none of the power that the volcano should promise. Instead of destructive lava or a churning fire, inside are dead, harmless flowers. This may suggest that at this point, Hermione's inner volcano is harmless and dead. H.D. associates the hyacinths with those dropped by Persephone; although gathered for love (of Demeter) they withered once Persephone was taken into the Underworld. In the same way, the

red flowers, which could have symbolized passion and love and at least suggest the beginnings of a more powerful nature, are dead and “riven” (75), just as her feelings for Lowndes are. Whatever powerful voice or force Hermione might have been, it has been dried and withered because they have been too long inside of it.

Caught between the desire for an independent self and an inward one unfettered by the judgments and opinions of others, Hermione also vacillates between the positives and negatives of being contained inwardly. She says, “She hadn’t asked any great thing, just to be let alone...She thought she had never been so happy” (75). By allowing her outward self to be dominated by others, Hermione maintains a solitary inward existence, one that does not have to acknowledge public opinion. By maintaining a different outside image, she protects herself. Instead of public condemnation, Hermione faces “people and faces and all blurred and nobody being a sharp sword...or any of those images or any of those steely, terrible...images of a stark pain” (75). Nothing directly touches Hermione since she does not project her inner, more vulnerable personality. Furthermore, by supposing that it is “the great thing” (75). Hermione recognizes that an entirely contained, private self is a difficult thing to procure, and thus is highly valued. Even so, Hermione rejects the volcano and the containment it represents. She underscores the lack of agency she has in her entrapment in the incarcerating volcano by saying, “She hadn’t asked nor walked into a volcano head on, seeing it just for the sake of sensation” (75). The entrapment of her inner self was not done on purpose; rather, it gradually developed and she went along with it. Furthermore, Hermione notes that “she thought she had been happy” (75), acknowledging that the containment itself is actually one of false comfort. When she is actually outside, despite the pain that she fears—“there was no pain” (75).

Hermione frequently uses volcanic imagery when she is focusing on her inward self; just as she hides her real thoughts and fears inside of her, so too is the image of the volcano produced. It is the inward, protective space in which she can place what the outside world may not wish to see. Following her miscarriage, Hermione begins to break down while spending time with Darrington. She is simultaneously racked with guilt for Darrington's ability to remain by her side and guilt for wishing that Darrington *would* go off to war. Stuck between inner desire and outer expectation, Hermione recedes to an inner self and pictures "Vesuvius and the jagged edge of Capri" (112), which invite pictures of the past—Hermione before she was Mrs. Darrington. Again, this container, which helps protect Hermione from breaking down publically (at least at the moment), is an entirely isolated thing. She cannot recede safely with Darrington; she says, "it wasn't [quiet] with Darrington, not really" (112)). Darrington allows none of the quiet isolation that Hermione needs to continually examine and reexamine herself; his is an intrusive presence.

This section also mirrors an inward-outward struggle on whether or not to leave her marriage, which she debates on 113. She goes back and forth: "You can't say this, this...but men will say O she was a coward, a woman who refused her womanhood...Women can't speak and clever women don't have children." Hermione struggles back and forth, realizing that she cannot be the clever, inwardly focused poet while being the outward domestic mother at the same time. Being opposites, they naturally create friction. This friction applies to the image of being buried inside lava. Inside the volcanic mess, or her marriage, she may be completely internalized, hiding behind the typical, public expectations of Undine or Mrs. Darrington. The image of Pompeii and the desire of associating with it become problematic, though. On one hand, it is completely safe and buried; it has the ability to preserve Hermione without being disturbed by outside forces. But

it is also marked by sterility and lack of growth; by receding too much, Hermione remains undecided, unmoving. She will never understand completely what her persona is because it does not have the ability to grow or change anymore. As if realizing this, Hermione dismisses the worth of her internal nature, commenting that upon digging them up, “there was no use remembering the treasures...Those things were buried” (118).

*Asphodel's* prequel, *HERmione*, also utilizes the inward image of the volcano. Although it is not as prevalent as in *Asphodel* (possibly suggesting at least a slightly more stable self), H.D. utilizes it in two key moments within the text. One of the places with Vesuvius in the text is near the end of the novel. Hermione has had her great breakdown and her consciousness roams in a sea of drugs and listlessness. She has no one to define her at this point, neither Fayne nor George nor even really Amy Dennon, her nurse during the breakdown. Grasping to realize who HER really is or even what she make of herself at this point, Hermione states:

Yet coming through the moment there were memories, red hyacinths in snow, red cyclamen seen through avid blighting lava. On the slopes of Vesuvius such memories burn, are cyclamen, are hyacinths...I will be caught finally, I will be broken. Not broken, walled in, incarcerated. Her will be incarcerated in Her...the lava Her-surface is sure to get me. (215)

This section, like the ones in *Asphodel*, recognize the struggle between an inward protective space and a public persona. The beginning of the quote describes her anticipated explosion; her memories, now on the surface (the “slopes” rather than inside) burn and are seen through the terrible lava. At the same time, Hermione recognizes her desire to turn inward, as well as the painful consequences. Thus, “Her will be incarcerated in Her.” No longer a warm,

safe space, the inwardness becomes suffocating and a prison. By perpetually assuming the outward persona and protecting the inner one, Hermione does not allow the inner self a chance to expand or communicate with the more public world. Hermione then will have no room to grow and her inner self choke, since it cannot completely exist at the same time as the outward persona. Instead of nurturing her, the contained inwardness (“the incarcerating part of Her Gart”), will destroy her.

Although these two novels both express the tension between an inner and outer self and express an anxiety towards that friction, they never relieve the tension and offer an explosion. Hermione remains undecided as to what she should do in both the books. *Hermione* ends with the reappearance of the dominating Fayne Rabb, whose immediate presence in *Asphodel* leads the reader to realize that Hermione again lets someone else decide her person for her and retreats inward. *Asphodel* does the same; although we see the promise of Hermione being able to display her inner self, we can only guess. Furthermore, because she is completely dependent on Beryl de Rothfeldt at the moment, one could safely infer that Hermione goes back into the same situation as with Lowndes and Rabb.<sup>5</sup>

Dickinson and H.D. both utilize volcanic imagery to express the desire to display an outer, more socially accepted persona and retain an inward, more chaotic one at the same time. They both note that tension exists in managing these two personas; as mentioned in *Asphodel*, a person cannot bear children (outwardly) and still be a writer at the same time (inward creativity and passion). However, this is where the likenesses between them begin to dissolve. In her poetry, Dickinson continually notes the power of her potential. Should she release what she is inwardly, she could potentially rework language and social convention as we know it. Her power would awe and terrify at the same time. However, she chooses to stop at that. It is potential, but

it is not allowed to be released. Dickinson offers no more solution to the tension than that. Every volcano remains latent and thus, inwardly focused. Perhaps for Dickinson, there is no solution; if one seeks containment, one must deal with the consequences. Ultimately it is a stalemate.

H.D., on the other hand, consistently rejects a focus on inwardness. Even in *Asphodel*, where she is at her most frantic (due to the trauma of World War I), H.D. recognizes that maintaining both personas means that she will neglect the more important, inner one. Her volcanoes, at least in her traumatized prose, also remain latent. She also cannot offer a solution, since she does not know how to wean herself from the dependence on other individuals with stronger, more outgoing and socially acceptable personalities. Because she has such a dependence on other personalities and because she is so consistently at odds with herself, H.D.'s volcanoes lack the agency that Dickinson's have. She is forced into containment by larger, more dominating persons and thus her inward self withers and chokes.

Despite both women being at odds with whether the volcano is a chosen container or a forced imprisonment, there is still the matter of the volcano as a symbol of tension and anxiety. This reveals itself in two prominent female writers, both of whom stand as prominent symbols for feminism. Because of this, we must both reexamine the image and ourselves as readers. Do we as feminists foist the destructive image onto the volcano metaphor, reading our own hopes of self-determination and power? Do we then ignore the anxieties and issues that the volcano may actually represent and thereby ultimately downplay the challenges that frequently face female writers? Finally, what are the implications of our reading it this way and how often might we have overlooked an image in an attempt to give women a literary pat on the back? To answer these questions, it may be helpful to reexamine the volcano, as well as other symbols of power

within feminist texts. While not necessarily being a cry for help, they may instead speak of the constant struggle and anxiety that writing as a whole causes.

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<sup>1</sup> The volcano is an androgynous space; the conic shape of the volcano thrusts upward, suggesting a phallic symbol, while the inside is a warm, internal womb-shaped space that cultivates churning lava, which produces extremely fertile soil. The writer stands between male and female; he/she does not have to decide between those who are in power and those who are subjugated. Because the volcano has both of these qualities, the volcano can assume a sort of gender-neutral zone; using it implies that the writer has chosen neither overtly masculine or feminine qualities.

<sup>2</sup> It is also worth noting that these “lips” may also be read as sexual. Genital implications allow the reader to examine them as labial imagery. Thus, the lava churning underneath becomes a violent sexual power that churns within the volcano/woman/writer. It is an overtly feminine power that the volcano may or may not choose to let out—hence the lips “part—and— shut” (11).

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, this line, which states “Taking Villages for breakfast, /and appalling Men” allows for an indeterminacy of appalling. Either appalling is an adjective and the men are appalling for limiting women, or appalling is the verb, meaning that Dickinson has the capability to appall men with what her liberation and consuming nature.

<sup>3</sup> Curious that Dickinson juxtaposes a possibly threatening volcano and a bird. Although the bird is comparatively weaker, it is he who makes the decision to choose and claim a piece of the volcano. This may be a comment on the latent power of women; although they hold an enormous sense of power—they allow themselves to be subjugated by the men.

<sup>5</sup> Although these two novels leave us with an unpromising vision of H.D., she does come out of her inner shell in her poem, *Trilogy*, in which she rejects the notion of inwardness. Although H.D. never specifically mentions a volcano exploding, she leaves behind her independence in “Flowering of the Rod.” Through the character of Mary Magdalene, H.D. presents the theme of the female-as-prophetess; Magdalene has complete power in this section. Instead of depending on the wiseman Kaspar for the holy oil, Mary has “need, not of bread nor of wine,/nor of anything that you can offer me” (FR 42 ). Mary is entirely independent; she needs neither earthly things nor the items a man can give her. If one places H.D., the poet-prophetess, in Mary’s place, this is an entirely different picture than H.D. as Hermione. No longer dependent on more dominant personalities, this woman is able to completely reject what others have to offer her and is instead completely reliant on her own self. She has no tension between inner and outer; because she is a prophetess, she continually expresses her inner feelings and thoughts. Furthermore, she has completely rejected the more demure outer persona; she visits Kaspar and lets her head scarf fall to the ground, an act that was socially unacceptable at the time. It also suggests a nakedness and therefore a sexuality about her not expressed before. Perhaps to visibly see an explosion of any kind, one must look at the writer progressively.

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