H.D.'S ASPHODEL: AN EXPERIMENT IN STYLE

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This thesis explores H.D.'s novel Asphodel, a roman à clef which closely parallels H.D.'s life during the World War I years. In the novel, H.D. uses both first-person and third-person limited narration. The combination of these two types of narration and her experimentation with style creates a duality in the text. Asphodel contains an intensely personal and subjective style of writing which focuses on a woman's experience rather than action. Unlike other studies of H.D.'s Asphodel, this thesis examines the significance of H.D's experimentation with style.
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On the title page of the only surviving manuscript of *Asphodel*, H.D. wrote "DESTROY." Until recently, the novel only existed in manuscript form, and interested parties had to travel to Yale University to read it. The novel, which parallels H.D.'s life during the early World War I years, is not only revealing because of the highly autobiographical nature of the text, but also because of her interesting experimentation with style. H.D. is generally known for her work as an Imagist poet, not as a novelist, yet she wrote several novels during her lifetime. Because H.D. did not intend *Asphodel* for publication, she took risks by revealing a great deal about her personal life, as well as by experimenting with new and interesting ways of writing. The differences between H.D.'s poetry from the 1920s and her prose clearly indicate that she was beginning to break the barriers of her Imagist aesthetic by working within another medium. Even more than the other novels she wrote at the time, *Asphodel* reflects her experimentation with style. Robert Spoo notes, that in both *HERmione* and *Asphodel*,

H.D. makes use of long, intricately rambling paragraphs and expressively congested passages of dialogue, though this fact will be apparent only to those who have seen both typescripts, as H.D.'s paragraphing in *Her* was profoundly altered by her own late revisions (possibly as late as the 1950s) and by numerous silent changes introduced by New Directions in the published text.

("H.D.'s Dating" par. 8)
Asphodel, as a text never meant for publication, reflects H.D.'s original vision of prose during the 1920s. Untouched in later years, it did not undergo extensive revisions as did some of her other works, such as HERmione. Although some might feel that the novel reflects an incomplete vision, it may serve as an illustration of another side of H.D.'s prose style. Asphodel reflects an intensely personal and subjective style of writing which focuses on a woman's experience rather than action. While many novels tend to center on action and objective descriptions of events, Asphodel is subjective and experience-oriented because of H.D.'s experimentation with narrative perspective, dialogue, stream of consciousness, punctuation, and repetition. Asphodel's duality is exemplified through the two types of narration and the experimentation with style she uses in the text.

Because of her message to destroy the novel, there has been some amount of controversy about Asphodel. Lawrence S. Rainey suggests that "what remains to be established, though, is whether she was really a poet of permanent and genuine stature, one whose control of poetry's basic formal resources—rhythm, syntax, and diction—matched a breadth of insight and understanding that deserves our continued attention" (108). Rainey tends to ignore the significance of H.D.'s novels, and discusses her work in terms of her poetry and the shifting of the canon. He believes that H.D. will not be seen as a significant writer in the future beyond her work as an Imagist poet. Rainey mentions Asphodel and believes that H.D.'s desire for it to be destroyed "says much about her own opinion of her work, of which she may have been a shrewd
judge, and it raises important questions about possible editorial approaches to her canon" (110). What Rainey implies is that her handwritten message to destroy the text reflects the quality of the writing. What Rainey fails to consider, however, is that her comment may have been more connected to the content of the novel rather than the quality of the writing. Robert Spoo points out that above the penciled remark to destroy the text, "H.D. has scrawled in red pencil or crayon "Duplicate" ("H.D.'s Dating" par. 3). Spoo goes on to explain that H.D. probably created more than one version of Asphodel, the first one completed in 1921-22, and the second in 1926. Whether H.D. intended for Asphodel to be destroyed or not will never be known, but most critics agree that her desire for the text to be destroyed is because of connections between this text and her personal life, especially her relationship with Bryher, rather than because of the quality of the writing. In fact, even prior to the publication of Asphodel in 1992, critics refer to the novel as an important experimental text.

In his introduction to the novel, editor Robert Spoo notes that Asphodel is "Quirky and nebulous rather than tightly focused and exquisitely controlled; repetitious and recursive instead of immediate in its effect; intensely personal and psychological rather than 'objective' in its dramatization of the perceiving mind" (Introduction ix). The novel is the antithesis of what would usually be expected in Imagist poetry, which tends to focus on the simplicity of an image and its overall single effect. In April of 1912, H.D., along with fellow Imagist poets Richard Aldington and Ezra Pound, agreed on a system of principles for quality writing:
1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.

2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.

3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not the metronome. (Robinson 57)

Although H.D. does not completely stray from these principles in Asphodel, it seems that her interpretation of quality prose is very different from her ideas about poetry. Her novel Asphodel tends to be elaborate and conversational, with many freedoms taken in regards to stylistic approach to writing.

The structure of the novel at first seems to be fairly traditional, and the use of a conventional form might indicate that the novel itself would follow regular rules of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and so on. This is certainly not the case with Asphodel. Susan Stanford Friedman believes that the novel "presents repeated clashes between conventional and unconventional narrative structures in which the forbidden story of the woman writer keeps reasserting itself against the formulaic plot of the nineteenth-century novel" (Penelope 172).

Structurally Asphodel does fit the traditional format: two parts to the novel, with fifteen chapters each. In content, though, the novel certainly strays from conventions. Asphodel, a roman à clef which parallels H.D.'s life from 1911 to 1919, is a novel which illustrates the needs and desires of a young woman and her search for fulfillment. Linda W. Wagner-Martin notes, "Most modern poems were brief and 'open,' their meaning resulting from patterns of separate images. Modern fictions were even less traditional, and plots with clearly marked rising
and falling action belonged to history" (150). *Asphodel* reflects a feminine modernism because it focuses less on action and more on experience. H.D. seeks to describe the world through a woman’s eyes, rather than create a traditional novel. H.D., like other women of her time, created her own writing style which is distinctly female. In a time when women’s writing could easily be overshadowed by that of their male counterparts, H.D. created works which focused on a woman’s experience in the world. In *Psyche Reborn*, Friedman notes that “the novels she wrote during the twenties... exhibit considerable experimentation with plot centered on reflection instead of action and with narration that rendered stream of consciousness” (67). H.D.’s focus on reflection rather than action is key to understanding her stylistic techniques. Most of *Asphodel* focuses on the character Hermione’s experiences, not necessarily through narrative action, but rather through how experiences affect her emotionally. Friedman and DuPlessis note, “H.D. experimented with the novel in ways typical of high, formalist modernism, with its development of interior monologue, its deemphasis on external plot to emphasize interior action, and its breakup of sequential chronology” (205). Like other modernists, H.D. experimented with narrative point of view and stream of consciousness techniques, but her experimentation results in a work which illustrates a woman’s search for happiness and fulfillment. Although H.D.’s experimentation with style is not unusual for modernist writers, *Asphodel* evolves into a unique expression of a woman’s experience.
Although she knew and admired many of the male writers of her time, including Ezra Pound and D. H. Lawrence, H.D. is probably most closely connected stylistically with Virginia Woolf. Friedman explains,

Woolf believed that the reality of experience was indeed ephemeral, momentary, and ultimately subjective. To capture the essence of human experience, the novelist must not limit himself or herself to rendering human behavior from the outside. . . . Woolf's theoretical and actual focus was on perception, not action; on the subjective, not the objective. (Psyche 68)

Like Woolf's, H.D.'s writing also reflects a focus on perception rather than action. In Asphodel, H.D. emphasizes Hermione's internal qualities rather than the external world. H.D. seems to be even more liberated in her writing because her novels are "highly autobiographical, far more explicitly so than even Woolf's To the Lighthouse or Orlando" (Friedman and DuPlessis 206). H.D. was not afraid to write about her own life in her novels, and by incorporating her own experiences, she was able to create female-centered, subjective novels. Wagner-Martin explains, "Because she [H.D.] was so surrounded by the truly experimental, so close to people such as Pound, Woolf, Lawrence, and Edith Sitwell, whose art was radical and distinctive, writing the fiction she chose was a relatively unselfconscious process" (149). H.D. could explore new possibilities with writing, just as many of her contemporaries did, partially because she knew experimental writers. What H.D. succeeded in doing was to create a female-centered fiction. Although this paper will not seek to suggest that men cannot
write in a feminine way, H.D.'s emphasis on reflection and perception rather than action, and subjectivity rather than objectivity, illustrates a gendered construction of the text. Like Woolf, H.D. focuses on internal qualities in her writing, which is certainly reflected in Asphodel.

H.D.'s connections with Freud may also help to explain her experimental style. Catherine Aldington explains that H.D. began her sessions with Freud "in March 1933. Freud no longer took patients but students" (par. 1). H.D. had a unique relationship with Freud because although she did meet with him to try to sort through some of the experiences in her life, they became friends. Although H.D. did not have sessions with Freud until 1933, she was still influenced by him earlier in her career (Friedman, Psyche 19). Friedman explains, "while there is no evidence that H.D. pursued this early interest in Freud during the imagist heyday in London, her exposure to psychoanalysis was renewed during the postwar years and greatly expanded as the twenties progressed" (Psyche 18). H.D. was writing Asphodel at about the same time that her interest in Freud would have begun—during the early to middle 1920s. In a letter to Friedman, Bryher explains, "You could not have escaped Freud in the literary world of the early twenties . . . Freud! All literary London discovered Freud about 1920 . . . the theories were the great subject of conversation wherever one went at that date" (Psyche 18). Certainly as Bryher's friend and because she lived in London during this time, H.D. could not help but be influenced by Freud as she was writing Asphodel.
H.D.'s relationship with Freud during their sessions may help to explain why she did not revise *Asphodel* as she did *HERmione*. Friedman points out that “in H.D.’s notes on her early sessions with Freud, she linked the two women [Frances Josepha Gregg and Bryher] and used the word `infatuation’ to describe her feelings about Gregg” (*Psyche* 39). Freud had a difficult time understanding H.D.’s relationship with women, and told her that she could not have been happy biologically with either woman. Friedman points out that “Freud’s negative reaction to biological fulfillment in lesbian sexuality appears to have given H.D. considerable pain” (*Psyche* 39). Perhaps one reason why *Asphodel* was not revised in H.D.’s later years is because she wanted it to retain her initial feelings about Gregg and Bryher. Although Freud did help her to overcome her writer’s block during the 1930s and recommended that she write about her life, changing the focus of *Asphodel* away from her relationships with women would have altered the entire scope of the novel. *Asphodel* remains in its original, more experimental form perhaps partially because of Freud’s reaction to her feelings about women. In Asphodel, “H.D.’s wholehearted passion for Frances Gregg and her more ambivalent feelings toward first Pound and then Aldington” are explored (Friedman, *Psyche* 39). *Asphodel*, which ends happily with Hermione and Beryl beginning a life together and their agreement to raise Hermione’s child together, reflects the happiness H.D. found in her own life with Bryher. Had she revised *Asphodel*, she may have significantly changed the style of the novel. H.D.’s vision of life and the modernist novel would not have been retained.
Asphodel is a woman’s vision of happiness reflected not only by the relationships described in the novel, but also by the stylistic approach.

In Asphodel, H.D. centers on the character Hermione Gart, who is the character patterned after herself. Part I focuses on events covering 1911 and 1912. Hermione travels to France with her friend Fayne (Frances Josepha Gregg, H.D.’s friend from Philadelphia), and Fayne’s mother, Clara. After some time spent sightseeing there, Hermione settles in London, where she meets her ex-fiancé George Lowndes, the figure based on Ezra Pound. Hermione struggles with her feelings for Fayne and declares her love for her, but Fayne chooses to marry an American lecturer. Part I ends with the suicide of Shirley Thornton, an unmarried American woman and acquaintance of Hermione’s. Part II begins in 1925, after Hermione has married Jerrold Darrington (the Richard Aldington figure). Disillusioned by the war, Hermione has an affair with Cyril Vane (the Cecil Gray figure), and soon after finds out she is pregnant. The novel ends with Hermione’s friend Beryl de Rothfeldt (H.D.’s companion Bryher) agreeing to stay with Hermione and help raise the child. The novel is essentially a description of a woman’s struggle to find love and happiness during World War I and her subsequent finding of this love through a union with Beryl, much like the one she wanted with Fayne. The plot of the novel is different from many other novels by men and women because of its gynocentrism. H.D.’s protagonist, Hermione, finds fulfillment in relationships with women, not with men. In fact, when Hermione tries to be intimate with a man, the relationship tends to be a source of turmoil and confusion. Asphodel reflects not only a
distinctly feminine style of writing, but also an emphasis on women's relationships.

H.D. creates an immediate intimacy with the reader by writing *Asphodel* mainly from the perspective of the central character, Hermione. By disrupting the "conventional narrative point of view;" however, H.D. creates a new kind of reality (Friedman, *Penelope* 171). H.D. shifts the point of view of the novel back and forth mainly between third-person limited and first-person narration. H.D. begins the novel with third-person narration: "France. France swirled under her feet for now that the boat was static it seemed inappropriately, that the earth must roll, revolve and whirl" (3). H.D. begins the novel in this manner to establish a narrative point of view, but she quickly shifts her focus to Hermione's. After several sections describing sightseeing, the narration abruptly moves to Hermione as the narrator. H.D. writes, "I [Hermione] always think the most awful thing in the world to be would be to be the mother of God. But maybe that's because I'm afraid. George said there needn't be any children. Must I ever, should I ever have one?" (13). In this case, H.D. signals the shift from third person limited to first person by including blank spaces between passages. Rather than divide the chapters into their own smaller sections, shifts in thought or narration are often signaled by several blank lines between passages. The reader must make the leap between first-person limited and third-person narrators by paying close attention to these blank spaces. Although one might think that the third-person limited narrator provides a more objective focus, the narrator still centers on Hermione's experience. The third-person limited
narrator describes scenes and passages with Hermione as the focal point, and the first-person narration reveals the personal musings of Hermione. Although H.D. jumps back and forth between these two methods, it works well because it creates a sense of intimacy. The reader does not hear the story exclusively from Hermione’s point of view or from the third-person narration. Not only are Hermione’s thoughts revealed, but also some less biased background is included.

At other times in the novel H.D. abruptly shifts from third-person limited to first-person narration without warning. In Part II, chapter 3 of *Asphodel*, H.D. includes a passage where the narration abruptly jumps from first-person to third-person limited narration. Hermione thinks to herself: "O put it on, put it on, how funny I look, like a doll now. I am a doll but it will amuse him. He said Merry Dalton was so ‘cute,’ he said cute like that not knowing it was so silly, so full of silly school-girl silliness to an American" (119). H.D. then quickly switches from Hermione’s thoughts to the third-person limited narrator: "Hermione had suddenly got across to her, saw her in one tremendous instant" (119). H.D. does not signal this shift in narration with any spaces between passages or even the beginning of a new paragraph. By blurring the distinction between the two types of narration, H.D. emphasizes Hermione’s voice as the dominant point of view in the novel. Even though a third-person limited narrator could follow the experiences of many characters in a work, the story is always centered on Hermione. The third-person limited narrator does not always seem to provide an objective point of view. Instead, this narration creates a new dimension for
viewing Hermione’s experience. Like Hermione’s first-person narrative, the third-person limited narrator perpetuates her thoughts and feelings. Although the reader is provided with a third-person limited narrator, possibly to help clarify events, often this narrator is more focused on Hermione’s reflections than perpetuating action.

By utilizing these two different types of narration, H.D. solves some problems with the telling of Hermione’s story. The third-person narration clarifies ideas and events, while the first-person narration illuminates Hermione’s emotions and feelings. The combination of the two is a perfect marriage of two different methods which may at first seem incompatible. Because H.D. was more interested in Hermione’s reflections than action, the third-person limited narration helps to move the story forward without breaking the continuity of Hermione as the focus. Wagner-Martin asserts,

H.D.’s narrative is successful partly because everything in the novel is reified through Hermione’s mind. . . . the reader believes in the mind of a character named Her. By writing a text that is so completely subjective, so located in Her’s consciousness, H.D. convinces the reader that her character’s impressions are the only validating “facts.” (154)

H.D. uses both first-person and third-person limited narration, but Hermione’s perspective dominates the story. Rather than use first-person or third-person limited narration exclusively, H.D. chooses to include both. The result is a novel
which seeks to follow one woman's experience mainly through her eyes, but which occasionally steps back to include another perspective.

By using more than one type of narration, H.D. provides the reader with both an objective and subjective point of view. For example, at a party in London, Hermione listens to a trivial conversation as a woman discusses dresses:

"Why look at the V cut as no one else does." "And the X and the Y and the Z." "One doesn't Teddy have a Z on one's gowns." "What then Vi-o-let, does one have it on?" "On?" "I mean Vi dear—off—" "Look Teddie. There's that parasite Jerry Walton. They say he killed his father." "Really? How interesting. But is it only a rumour?" (47)

This passage of third-person limited narration includes a conversation which Hermione could easily join. Hermione is bored, however, by the people at this party, and the narration shifts to her point of view: "O Fay, where are you dear? Look at the people, the funny people, the witty people. There seems no one sad at all, only someone who has broken a lorgnette, poor darling, she holds it up for everyone to see and only half the people care" (47). Hermione longs for her friend and companion, Fayne. Without the third-person narrator's descriptions of the party and the dialogue, Hermione's internal thoughts would not make sense. H.D. uses a combination of first-person and third-person narration in order to perpetuate the action of the novel. Although the focus of the novel is on reflection, not action, without the third-person limited narrators descriptions, the
action of the novel could not move forward. The third-person limited narrator provides a context for Hermione's thoughts. Hermione's thoughts would run together into an almost incomprehensible jumble.

Because of the use of two different points of view, at times the narration becomes problematic. H.D. does not use signal phrases to introduce new speakers, nor does she use regular punctuation for passages of dialogue. Because of these stylistic techniques, at times the reader is left guessing who the speakers are, and must very carefully dissect the passages to determine the speakers. The dialogue is "expressively congested and often not clearly attributed" to any particular character (Spoo, Introduction xiii). This blurring of speakers draws the reader farther into Hermione's mind. By erasing the distinctions between characters the novel seems to be more and more about Hermione's thoughts rather than any real conversations. In some cases, it is almost impossible to derive who the speakers are. For example, in the first chapter of Part I, Hermione, Fayne, and Clara go sightseeing in Paris. Within the stream of consciousness of Hermione are included bits and pieces of their conversations while seeing the sights. A conversation between the three women at a café typifies this problem:

"Let's have the coffee outside. Everyone's gone now. Café spécial. Yes. We must have it hot, strong" "You drink too much black coffee. Abuse yourself—" "O God. Really Clara—"

"Wh-aaat?" "O, I don't know what you said. No. It wasn't funny. I didn't mean to be rude. But I do. I am. I don't know what you

This passage of dialogue is included in a longer section which focuses on Hermione's thoughts in first-person point of view. In this conversation there are three speakers: Hermione, Clara, and Fayne. Yet, without any signal phrases to mark the speakers, and because of the lack of paragraphing, it is extremely difficult to follow. Only by reading passages such as these very closely can the speakers be identified. Because most of the narrative is from Hermione's perspective, bits and pieces of dialogue are omitted. The reader reads what Hermione hears, but she may miss parts of conversation, and it is up to the reader to fill in the gaps. Although conversations in the novel are in third-person limited point of view, H.D. still emphasizes Hermione's experiences. The textual gaps in conversations illustrate the gaps in Hermione's perception. She is engaged in a conversation, yet the reader's experience is subjective rather than objective, and based on Hermione's perception rather than action.

Dialogue between multiple characters becomes even more problematic when there are more than three speakers involved. A group of Hermione's acquaintances in London discuss her almost as if she is not there:

"It's so quaint, she loves London." "Yes, isn't it odd—she loves London." "This Miss Gart—they call her Her—she loves London." "Oh I am—so—glad. Why do you love London?" "O let me really tell you Bertie, that Miss Her Gart loves London. Such a quaint person—" "Yes, I love London." (41)
Until Hermione speaks at the end of the passage, it is never entirely clear who the speakers are. This blurring of the speakers in a large group emphasizes Hermione's role as the dominant voice in the novel. Even when the third-person limited narrator takes over, Hermione's viewpoints are the ones expressed. The female point of view takes over in not only Hermione's voice, but also in the third-person limited narrator's viewpoint. H.D. does not intend for the reader to try to decipher who the various speakers are in passages like this one; instead, any voice other than Hermione's becomes a blur of characters. None of the characters are in crowds are fully developed; instead, they are flat, fluid characters. These characters are not described because they are not important to Hermione; people like these are as indecipherable to her as they are to the reader. Even though the third-person limited narrator provides conversations like this one, H.D. intends the reader to be as disinterested as Hermione is, so she does not include distinguishing characteristics. Hermione's experience is more relevant because speakers are frequently unidentified, yet her voice is always easy to distinguish from the other characters.

Besides dialogue incorporating multiple characters, there are sections of dialogue in which H.D. only includes one speaker's side of the conversation. When Hermione returns to Paris for a brief time at the end of Part I, she goes to rent a room. She has a conversation with the proprietor: "Yes thank you madame. I am very tired.' Yes the room was pretty. Yes Miss Moore was a great friend. Yes she had been at school with Miss Moore’s sister. . . Yes she liked her petit déjeuner in bed, in the morning, about eight, no not later" (89).
Here the dialogue breaks down even further. None of the questions that the proprietor of the hotel asks are retained, yet the general feel of the conversation still remains. By only providing one side of the conversation, H.D. illustrates the generic quality of the questions the proprietor asks. As is the case with many people traveling, the unwritten questions are the types of questions Hermione is asked over and over again. The lack of quotation marks after the beginning of the conversation and lack of questions suggests that Hermione is not even thinking about the replies, but just saying what is expected of her in such a situation. Unlike the dialogue with multiple speakers, H.D. blends the speakers into one voice: Hermione's. Even though this could easily be represented as a complete conversation, H.D. chooses to represent Hermione's perspective only so that the emphasis will be on her experience. The difficulty of the conversation lies in the punctuation; does H.D. intend this to be a real conversation, or are these things that Hermione is thinking? Because the quotation marks are absent, it could mean that Hermione is imagining the questions she will be asked at the hotel, but because H.D. often uses nontraditional techniques in the novel, H.D.'s representation of a one-sided conversation becomes rooted in Hermione's outlook. Hermione wishes that she were imagining this conversation, but it is real. The lack of a second voice in the conversation emphasizes Hermione's experience.

Another stylistic technique H.D. uses throughout the novel is stream of consciousness narration. By using stream of consciousness, H.D. helps the reader become an intimate part of the action of the novel. Friedman explains
that H.D., more than any other modernist writer, "directly applied the modern novel's experimentations with stream of consciousness to the creation of her own neo-epic style" (Psyche 67). H.D.'s stream of consciousness in Asphodel characteristically falls into two categories. Sometimes she connects many ideas into long, elaborate sentences that are strung together and begin to explain Hermione's feelings. In Part I, chapter three, H.D. describes Walter Dowel's piano playing. Walter is a student of Debussy's and whenever his music is mentioned H.D. uses images of water to describe it. In a passage of third person narrative, H.D. describes Walter's music:

It was winter when Walter played. Cold and chill and the sound of the notes was the last drop of an icicle that started to melt in the spring, melting, it must melt but decided not to melt and broke off like a little crystal bead and fell down, down, down and broke with an infinitude sound, the lightest sharp cold ice note at the top of the piano, making the whole world vibrate. (29-30)

Like the music of Debussy which he plays, Walter's performances evoke images of water. Here, the description of his playing shows the connection between phrases of music. His music is not short and disjointed but flowing and interconnected, and this is reflected in the sentences H.D. writes. She recreates the sound of the music through long sentences and repetition of sounds and words. The repetition of hard and soft "c" sounds and the diphthong "ow" connects the words together by the sounds that they make. The stream of consciousness description of the breaking of a single drop of an icicle is the
clarity and purity of the music that Walter produces. At this point in the novel, when Hermione is first introduced to Walter, she comes back to this music. The flowing sounds of the music become a part of her and embedded into her consciousness, which the reader has an opportunity to view because it is recorded on the page. Although this passage is from a third person point of view, Friedman notes, it "gives us no sensation of being 'outside' of or detached from the textual vortex of Hermione's thoughts" (Penelope 171). Hermione's thoughts are a part of this description of the music. The stream of consciousness technique in both narrative points of view helps to create a seamless union of the two types of narration.

At other times, the stream of consciousness techniques used in the novel are disjointed, usually to emphasize an unpleasant event or confusion that Hermione is feeling. At the beginning of Part II, Hermione gives birth to a stillborn baby during an air raid. Deborah Anne Moreland explains that Hermione continues "obsessively recounting the birth . . . [and] remembers 'guns, guns, guns'" (253). The realization that her baby is dead comes at the end of chapter one: "God. But it was true. Guns. Guns. Guns. Thank God she had suffered to the sound of guns and the baby wasn't . . . dead. . . not born . . . still born. . . but it didn't matter. 'Darling but—you—don't—care—any—more'" (114-15). In this case Hermione's consciousness is disjointed because of the shock of the truth. Her thoughts about the loss of the baby are connected to the sounds of war, hence the repetition of the word "guns." Hermione internalizes her feelings during the incident. She tells her husband Jerrold that she does not care, but
the truth is that she does. She connects the loss of the baby to war and
devastation and only through her thoughts can this be understood. Because
Hermione keeps going back to the idea of "guns," the repetition of the word in
her subconscious illustrates the problems she has trying to accept the loss of
her child. When Hermione is pregnant with her second child she comes back to
the idea of "Guns, guns" (161). The narrative is continuously connected by
Hermione's repeated thoughts and ideas. In another similar stream of
consciousness passage in the novel, H.D. repeats the word ears: "Ears. Ears.
Ears. There were ears tilted up, ears tilted down, ears side-ways. Ears were
shells, were flowers, and into those ears (impersonal ears) the music poured and
flowed, impersonal, everyone might listen, Hermione, the Dalton woman. Delia"
(45). Once again, short, disjointed phrases are included to punctuate
Hermione's unhappiness with a particular experience. In this case, she is
distraught because anyone may listen to the music, yet few will truly understand
it. She explains that there are "impersonal ears" that belong to people who do
not care about the performance or the performer. Like the passage which
repeats the word guns, this short section of text illustrates Hermione's discomfort
through short, choppy phrases and a repeated word.

H.D.'s unusual punctuation is another aspect of Asphodel that is unique to
her prose style. At times the irregular punctuation that she uses is to help evoke
a verbal quality in her writing. In passages of dialogue, such as "'But what to
you—is—funny—to—us—is—simply—,'" (16) which is spoken by Clara to
Hermione, the dashes help to show her vocal inflections. Clara speaks this line
slowly, yet connected, and is trying to tell Hermione something that might upset her, so she drags it out. Here, the use of dashes shows the connection between the words as well as the connection between the sound of the words. Hermione's aural perception of the words are recorded on the page. Because H.D. emphasizes Hermione's experience throughout the novel, even the placement of dashes illustrates the character's perception. Sometimes dashes are used to illustrate a speaker's confusion. For example, during a conversation with Vane, Hermione says, "But you—see—I mean—it isn't just an—idea—" (155). The dashes help to explain the perplexity Hermione feels as she tries to explain her emotions to Vane. As with the previous example, the dashes illustrate Hermione's perception. H.D. typically uses dashes within third-person limited narration, and by emphasizing the sound of the dialogue, she connects it even closer to Hermione's experience. Because the third-person limited narration helps to provide information to help move the story forward, the use of dashes helps to emphasize Hermione's point of view. Through experimentation H.D. obscures traditional distinctions about narrative point of view. Hermione's internal qualities can be seen externally through this visual representation of the sound that words make.

H.D. also tends to use hyphens in an unusual way. For example, with words such as "fashion-plate" (85), "lilac-blue" (99), "baby-killers" (118), "honeycomb" (143), "lily-bud" (150), and "sun-god" (187), she combines words not usually joined by a hyphen. She tends to hyphenate words in adjective-noun combinations when it is not necessary grammatically. These hyphenations
could be added for aesthetic value, rather than for any other purpose, but the words are connected together the way that words are connected when spoken. As in her use of dashes, H.D. uses hyphens as an illustration of how the words sound in Hermione’s mind. H.D. thinks of nouns and their descriptors in these combinations. Just as with her use of dashes, the hyphens indicate a closer connection between the words than their grammatical connection. Through the use of these hyphenated words, H.D. also seeks to emphasize the subjectivity of Hermione's experience. The noun in each word parallels the objective experience, whereas the adjective in each word represents the subjective experience. By combining the subjective and objective through each hyphenated word, H.D. represents the subjectivity and objectivity of her protagonist’s experience. The hyphenated words exemplify the duality of H.D.’s text. She balances the narrative between third-person limited and first-person narration and tends to play with subjectivity and objectivity in the novel. This dichotomy between the subjective and objective is seen throughout the text, and like many of the other stylistic techniques H.D. experiments with, the hyphenation of words just continues to accentuate Hermione's experience.

Besides her unique use of hyphens and dashes, H.D. creates a conversational, almost musical feel to the text in the placement of commas. In some places where commas should be used, they are omitted; other times she adds commas where they do not usually belong. This nontraditional “use of commas is loose and impressionistic, a practice appropriate to the free, experimental style of Asphodel” (Spoo, Introduction xviii). Like the
Impressionistic music of Debussy she mentions in the text, H.D.’s depiction of Hermione’s thoughts become fluid. In one of the most beautiful and coherent passages in the book, Hermione declares her love for Fayne: “I, Hermione, tell you I love you Fayne Rabb. Men will say I love you Hermione but will anyone ever say I love you Fayne as I say it?” (52-53). Here the commas are fairly regular, but the use of inversion and repetition of ideas, along with the commas make this passage even more lovely. Other times the lack of commas reflects the stream of consciousness effect that dominates the novel. For example, in the last passages of the novel, she writes, “Here I [Hermione] am sitting on the top of a bus and it might be anywhere with light snow drifting and little pink almonds all along the fronts of brick houses and behind rusty laurel hedges putting out pink fingers” (204-5). This sentence includes one complete image of Hermione on top of a bus, looking at houses in the snow. The lack of commas makes the image even more succinct because the reader sees through Hermione’s eyes. If she were to describe this scene to another person, this is how it would sound. H.D. uses the inclusion or lack of commas to mirror Hermione’s thoughts. In both of these passages of first-person narrative, Hermione’s feelings are compounded by the punctuation included or omitted. This emphasis on the subjective rather than action fits Hermione’s unique and feminine experience. The inclusion or omission of commas connects directly to how Hermione thinks. In both of these passages, Hermione’s thoughts are clear and easily perceptible.
H.D. is also experimental in her use of parentheses. In sections of third person narrative, sentences are frequently enhanced by new ideas included in parentheses. When Hermione's baby is born stillborn, there is a passage of third-person limited narration that describes how Hermione feels: "The state she had been in was a deadly crucifixion. Not one torture (though God that had been enough) but months and months when her flaming mind beat up and she found she was caught" (113). The "torture" of the death of her baby is not the only hardship she had endured during her pregnancy, and through the simple phrase in parentheses this information is revealed. Although this is a passage of third-person limited narration, the phrase in parentheses indicates Hermione's thoughts. H.D. could have included this information in a separate sentence, but by including it as a parenthetical aside she makes the text more conversational and casual. The use of parenthetical first-person asides causes the narrative to be even more centered on Hermione. Although the third-person limited narration helps to clarify events and perpetuate action, often Hermione's voice overshadows it because of the parenthetical interjections. The parenthetical information creates an intimacy with the reader that could not be produced as easily through other methods.

H.D. also uses parentheses as a way of adding unspoken information to dialogue. In a conversation between Hermione and Cyril, Cyril says, "I tell you, frankly, (we were always frank) you do not" (147). The phrase in parentheses, "we were always frank," is added into the dialogue to enhance it and add information, but it is not spoken. These are Hermione's thoughts interjected into
the dialogue. H.D. does this as another way of embellishing the text. Rather than include this information in a signal phrase, which she completely avoids, it becomes a part of the dialogue. These parenthetical asides also indicate what Hermione is thinking, so that during a narrative section, the focus is still entirely on Hermione's experience even in the midst of another character's speech. By interjecting Hermione's thoughts into another character's dialogue, H.D. blurs the distinction between characters. Many characters do not seem to have a completely separate personality from Hermione's; instead, some characters are seen always through Hermione's eyes. Even if the third-person limited narrator includes passages of dialogue, these conversations are dominated by Hermione. The female voice takes over the scope of the text.

Perhaps the most important stylistic technique that H.D. uses in Asphodel is the use of repetition. Not only does she use repetition of words within sentences and shorter passages, but she also includes recurring elements throughout the novel. The repetition of words or short phrases tends to be limited to specific chapters or sections of chapters. Repetition is used as a rhythmic device as well, and as a way of emphasizing important ideas. At the beginning of the novel when Hermione, Fayne, and Clara are touring France, the third-person narrator explains how Hermione feels about their trip: "Sights, sights. Sights. The clock so huge, the narrow arch and the cobbles that burnt and hurt the soles of her unsuitably clad feet" (14). The repetition of the word "sights" emphasizes Hermione's fatigue and growing lack of interest in visiting all of the important sights on their agenda. Repetition of the word
“sights” also evokes the idea of repeating footsteps; it becomes a kind of chant that symbolizes the effort of walking from place to place, from sight to sight. Later in the novel, while Hermione is listening to some music she does not care for, she thinks, "There was no colour where this was. The music was transparent. Who said there was colour in music? Someone, somewhere. People now were always saying it. Colour in music, tones, sound in pictures. Colour. There was no colour in this thing" (44). H.D. repeats the word colour, emphasizing Hermione's attempt to understand the music. The repetition of the word also helps to blur the art forms she considers while listening to music; music and visual art become one in the same. H.D. diminishes the distinction between pictures and music just as she diminishes the separation of the two narrative points of view. This constant parallel of blurring of ideas in the novel and stylistic techniques helps Asphodel to be more cohesive.

Besides repeating the same word in a series, H.D. also repeats sentences, stressing ideas that Hermione has fixated on. When Hermione's friend Shirley commits suicide, she is told by a maid who comes to the door when she goes to call on Shirley for afternoon tea. In this passage, Hermione is shocked by the news:

Shirley wasn't dead. Shirley wasn't dead. It was impossible. There were a thousand things she might have said to her... Hermione had suspected something terrible. What was terrible?... This was Sunday. 'But this is—Sunday.' Hermione repeated it to the maid
who was standing ghoulign at her. "She asked me to come Sunday.' (101)

Hermione keeps repeating the same ideas over and over again. She denies the fact that Shirley could be dead and tries to nullify this information by rejecting it—"Shirley wasn't dead." The repetition of "terrible" and the day of the week, "Sunday," is also an attempt by Hermione to reject the possibility of Shirley being dead. Repetition here is certainly an attempt by Hermione to deny the truth of the situation. By repeating words, H.D. stresses the pain that Hermione feels and draws the reader closer to the catastrophe. Hermione's subjective feelings of pain and suffering are illustrated by repetition. Even though this sentence is repeated in third-person limited narration, passages such as this one seem to be a part of Hermione's thoughts. Hermione begins to understand herself better through these internal struggles, just as the reader does.

H.D. also uses repetition of sentences throughout the novel to show ideas and thoughts that keep going through Hermione's mind. When she was still in Philadelphia, Hermione was engaged to George Lowndes. The ending of their engagement is ambiguous, and Hermione is not sure exactly what happened, or if there is an understanding between the two of them or not. When asked if she is engaged to George, Hermione replies, "I mean we got engaged then we—I mean he—no it was I this time—I mean I broke it—off—I mean it was broken off—" (41). Hermione's confusion about the engagement continues, and enters into her subconscious thoughts in the form of a negation of the relationship: "But you can't marry him" (91). At one point Hermione thinks to herself, "But
you can't marry him." Who said that? Who kept on repeating that at shorter intervals, saying it from nowhere, from somewhere" (69). This phrase is repeated again and again in Hermione's stream of consciousness thoughts as she struggles with the idea of marriage. Because George is the one who finalizes the fact that they are not engaged, Hermione seems to keep coming back to this point. She begins to think that there is another voice speaking to her, forcing her to deal with this situation. Hermione begins a dialogue with herself in her head. This imaginary dialogue reasserts Hermione's perception as the focal point of the novel. She seems to care for the man, and knows "'But you can't marry him.'" By reminding herself over and over again that she cannot be with George, the repetition of the phrase is an attempt on her part to erase her feelings for him. Just when it seems that Hermione has eliminated George from her mind, the phrase appears again, amidst unrelated thoughts. Even when Hermione is told of Shirley's death, she remembers, "'Shirley was a virgin. That was what made them laugh, asking why she didn't marry George Lowndes. Soon they would laugh at Hermione who hadn't married George Lowndes. But of course you can't marry him'" (101). Hermione's unhappiness about the loss of her fiancé and loss of a chance to be married is emphasized by the repetition of this phrase, and helps the reader to become even closer to the character. The repetition of "But of course you can't marry him" continues to emphasize Hermione's perspective as the dominant viewpoint in Asphodel. By repeating sentences like these, H.D. continues to place the emphasis of her writing on the female experience.
Asphodel was a way for H.D. to convey intensely personal thoughts. By exploring stylistic techniques, it can be seen that she succeeded in creating a new, modern style in her writing. By expanding from an Imagist poet to novelist, H.D. creatively explores her own autobiographical past through her characters. Her unusual stylistic techniques within a traditional structure for the text truly creates a modernist novel with interesting stylistic implications. This new modernism is "consistently lyric and rhythmic, repetitious and hypnotic" (Friedman 187). In Asphodel, H.D. blurs the distinction between first-person limited and third-person narration. By erasing the distinctions between the narrative voices, Hermione's more subjective point of view takes over the text. H.D.'s emphasis on a woman's experience through her stylistic experimentation illustrates a modernism unique to her writing; for although other female novelists, such as Woolf, created works centered in the female experience, Asphodel, through its many experimental elements, seems to illustrate this even more fully than other texts. As Wagner-Martin explains, H.D. "was by nature an innovator, and she was willing to take the range of chances that being innovative demanded" (148). Through her ability to take risks stylistically and personally, H.D. effectively created a novel which emphasizes the subjective rather than the objective and experience rather than action.
Works Cited


