

Bethlehem's H.D.: the Lehigh Valley's most important literary figure (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Gadfly's posts, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Serious Issues January 31, 2019

(1st in a series of posts on H.D.)

"FINDING H.D. is a community exploration of our greatest literary native daughter."

"H.D. is the most profound interpreter of the meaning of Bethlehem that we have yet had."

Seth Moglen

One of the warmest places in our town for fifty or so lovers of literature on a brutal bitter Wednesday night was the 2nd floor meeting room in the library, where Prof. Seth Moglen of Lehigh's English Department led a "community exploration" to find H.D.

Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961), known as H.D., was a Bethlehem native whose "innovative and experimental poetry and prose established her as a leading Modernist artist and pioneering voice in feminism in the 1910s and 1920s." City Hall was built on the site of her family home, she's buried in Nisky Hill, and Lehigh gave her an honorary degree in 2015. She was added to the Literary Landmarks register in 2017, and there's a plaque at the library.



"FINDING H.D. A Community Exploration of the Life and Work of Hilda Doolittle" — a partnership between the Lehigh University English Department, the Bethlehem Area Public Library, Mock Turtle Marionette Theater, and Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center — is a 12-month-long community exploration of the life and work of H.D., culminating in the premiere of a new play by Mock Turtle Marionette Theatre in October of 2019 at Touchstone Theatre.

Jodi Duckett, "Finding H.D., 'a year-long exploration of the life of feminist poet Hilda Doolittle, kicks off in Bethlehem." Morning Call, November 9, 2018.

Linda Doell, "Hilda 'H.D.' Doolittle: Exploring a Bethlehem-born poet and a community." Morning Call, January 25, 2019.

Moglen's warmly intimate remarks entitled "How I Fell in Love with H.D. (And Why You Should Too)" was the second in a series of about a dozen events centered on "the Lehigh Valley's most important literary figure" starting last November and extending into next October.

The full calendar of this "Year of H.D" can be found in the *FINDING H.D. brochure linked here.*

The next event is "H.D.'s Moravian Roots in Bethlehem" by Moravian's Craig Atwood, February 26, 6:30-8 at the library.

Logistics done for now. Let's begin to think why we should "find" H.D. Gadfly is ashamed. Not only has he not covered "the Arts," but he must candidly admit to knowing virtually nothing about H.D. Gadfly bets most of his followers would say the same. "Who is this remarkable woman whom most of us have never heard of?" says Moglen.

Well, Gadfly learned a lot about H.D. last night, things he will share over the next several posts about her. For starter was Gadfly's surprise that the work of this woman who left town while quite young, who traveled the world, who spent virtually all of her adult life outside the United States, who moved in the highest literary circles of her day always had Bethlehem on her mind. She wasn't just born here; she was shaped here.

FINDING H.D. is a community exploration of our greatest literary native daughter, and *FINDING H.D.* is posing the kind of question that I wish people all over the United States were posing, which is to say, not just how can we learn about an important writer but how by engaging with art do we learn who we are, how do we learn about ourselves by encountering writers and artists who have shaped and transformed us. Every time we encounter a work of art you encounter partly some aspect of yourself which resonates with that work. And to be part of a community engaged in a systematic endeavor saying what does it mean that this writer who transformed literature in English grew up, was a child, and was raised in this place, and thought about Bethlehem all her life. What does that mean to talk about the poet she became, and what does that mean about the city she bequeathed to us.

And she wasn't just born here and shaped here, but she can tell us about ourselves: "H.D. is the most profound interpreter of the meaning of Bethlehem that we have yet had."
Now that's intriguing!

In my view, H.D. matters to the city of Bethlehem not only because she was born here. But the body of poetry and fiction and memoirs that she created would have been unthinkable had she not grown up in this place and had her family not had such deep roots here. But in my view, H.D. is the most profound interpreter of the meaning of Bethlehem that we have yet had. The body of work that H.D. produced about the city of Bethlehem, about the meaning and evolution of the city over the 150 years before her childhood is an extraordinary body of work

So mark your calendars for the February 26 "Moravian Roots" lecture. Gadfly will remind you.

And Gadfly will present more of Moglen's remarks in upcoming posts. A tip o' the hat and a wave o' the wings to event organizers Doug Roysdon, Jennie Gilrain, Seth Moglen, Mary Foltz, Josh Berk, Liz Bradbury, and others I don't know – and to BAPL's Matt for coordinating the local arrangements.