

# Craig Atwood's work on the Moravians and H.D.: "a gift to our city" (6)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Fun Stuff, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) March 1, 2019

(6th in a series of posts on H.D.)

[Finding H.D.: A Community Exploration of the Life and Work of Hilda Doolittle](#)

*The next event in this year-long series is "Challenging Limited Understandings of Gender and Sexuality" by Lehigh University's Mary Foltz, Wednesday, March 6, 6:30-8 at the Bethlehem Area Public Library.*

Here is the full recording of Prof. Craig Atwood's lecture on "H.D.'s Moravian Roots in Bethlehem" last Tuesday. Gadfly followers know that we always go first to the primary source, so take advantage to refresh yourself if you attended or to listen anew if you didn't. But below as well over the next post or two, Gadfly will present pieces of Craig's lecture with some soundbites.

After a general introduction, Lehigh University Seth Moglen's introduction to Craig's lecture begins at min. 4:25, Craig's lecture itself begins at min. 6:27, and the Q 'n A session begins at min. 1:05:00.

**AUDIO RECORDINGS UNAVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE**

Seth introduced Craig as "one of the foremost scholars of the Moravian Church . . . and especially of the men and women who created this extraordinary community here in Bethlehem . . . author of [the must-read] *Community of the Cross*. . . . Craig's work really matters for this community. We as a city are extraordinarily blessed to have somebody who has devoted decades of patient, careful, precise, fastidious scholarship to the exploration of what really happened at the start of this community . . . *a gift to our city*."

Craig:

"How did I first learn about H.D.? Because a classmate in grad school accosted me in the dining room one day,



he was a big Ezra Pound fan . . . ‘is it true the Moravians used to worship the bloody side wound of Jesus and wanted to crawl inside the side wound?’ Well, yes. . . . [I was] translating *The Litany of the Wounds*, one of the more controversial Moravian liturgical pieces.”

Have you ever heard of *The Litany of the Wounds*? I need to know more!

“What makes [H.D.] so interesting for me is she does leave her home town but she never stops thinking about it, writing about it, and later in her career she focuses quite a bit of research on the Moravians in Bethlehem.”

“Her mother was Helen Wolle, and the Wolle family is one of the most important Moravian families in the history of Bethlehem, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially in Bethlehem’s musical culture. So H.D. was aware of this rich Moravian heritage of music and hymnody, and some of the hymns the Moravians no longer sing, she knew. She participated actively in the rituals of the Central Moravian Church. . . . She had some of her visions and experiences in worship. . . . Her grandmother is one of the major ones communicating this Moravian heritage, which included the Moravian heritage of strong female leaders, strong female missionaries to Native Americans. . . . As far as I can tell, it was her psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud that led her to re-examine her Moravian background. She was convinced that her gift came from this Moravian heritage.”

Here’s an example of her gift in practice. H.D. has a vision of the Moravian past in one of the final paragraphs of her autobiographical work *The Gift*, written during and written about living in London during the great bombings of World War II – the Blitz – the first systematic, sustained bombing of civilians in world history. (Listen beginning min. 13:35)

I push open the kitchen door and turn round. I stand by the kitchen door opposite the mirror, *in a glass darkly*. But now face to face. We have been face to face with the final realities. We have been shaken out of our ordinary dimension in time and we have crossed the chasm that divides time from time-out-of-time or from what they call eternity.

I heard Christian Renatus saying:

*Wound of Christ,  
Wound of God,  
Wound of Beauty,  
Wound of Blessing,  
Wound of Poverty,  
Wound of Peace*

and it went on and on, while underneath it there was the deep bee-like humming of the choir of Single Brothers and Craig explains:

“Paul [“in a glass darkly”] was referring to our current situation of not being able to see the ultimate reality clearly because our perspective is distorted by our earthly limits. Paul says that one day we will see God face-to-face . . . we do not fully know ourselves until we have this experience. And H.D. is turning that around and says the experience of war and death that she is seeing in London means that her generation was already facing ultimate reality.”

“[H.D.] imagines Christian Renatus [the son of Zinzendorf, who died in London and was buried not far from where she was having this vision] with other Moravian leaders and the Single Brothers in her hometown of Bethlehem on Sand Island, which was called the Isle of Wounds.”

There was an island here called the Isle of Wounds????

“Why would she have this vision of this dead person singing to the wounds of Christ in a place he never visited? Why would a poet . . . be at this time of her life looking to one of the most controversial Christian groups for inspiration? The simple answer is that H.D. became convinced that her own Gnostic religious ideas, her mystical experiences,

her poetic gifts, her prophetic gifts were rooted in an esoteric spirituality of Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Bethlehem in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She embraced some of the most controversial aspects of Zinzendorffianism, which the Church in her day had suppressed. But she could hear the echoes of it . . . and always had the feeling the Church was hiding something from her.”

Pretty damned interesting, no?!

Stay tuned for another slice of Craig’s lecture.

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