

H.D. tries to reclaim lost Bethlehem tradition (8)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Fun Stuff, Gadfly's posts, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) March 5, 2019

(8th 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, TOMORROW Wednesday, March 6, 6:30-8 at the Bethlehem Area Public Library.

Here again is the full recording of Prof. Craig Atwood’s lecture on “H.D.’s Moravian Roots in Bethlehem” a week ago.

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

Gadfly’s been reabsorbing Craig’s lecture in handy slices. In this third and last slice (mins. 40-65), Craig connects H.D. with repressed elements of Zinzendorf’s theology (especially interesting the “Litany of the Wounds” and the feminine nature of his theology), and concludes that H.D. “understood the Moravians had repressed what was central to the founding of Bethlehem and tried to reclaim that mystical tradition in her writings” and that the “Moravians failed because they turned away from this radical theology which she hoped to reclaim in her poetry.”

It is startling to Gadfly to learn how central Bethlehem and the Moravians are to H.D.’s work. H.D. is not just an author born in Bethlehem; Bethlehem is in her.

Again, crank up the audio, and listen along!

Here are Gadfly’s “class notes” on mins. 40-65:

- all of the repulsive imagery of the bleeding side of Christ was for H.D. the prayer that reaches Heaven because it’s the wounded Christ who restores the balance between masculine and feminine

- “Island of Wounds” the *Wunden Eiland*, in the Monocacy creek, believed it was shaped like the side wound of Christ
- Single Brothers would gather there after dark for singing and other rituals
- in her autobiographical narrative *The Gift*, England, where she was living in the early 1940s during the war, becomes the *Wunden Eiland*
- *The Gift* ends with sharing a ritual from 200 years earlier: “The Litany of the Wounds”
- “Litany of the Wounds” is one of the most controversial parts of Moravian devotion
- for the Bethlehem Moravians, this was one of their most important liturgical elements
- a Savior did not conquer but suffered and ruled through love
- The Wounds liturgy was not sifted, not repressed until the 19th century
- Moravian art puts the side wound of Jesus over the heart
- in H.D.’s time Moravians are removing all this wound language from their hymns
- possible that her pastors told her this was pathological nonsense
- she would have heard it as something whispered about in private
- wounds are multi-valent religious symbol
- the wound is a portal into the mind of God, was God opening his heart to the people
- doorway into mystical union with God
- security, healing, womb/birth canal, vagina in His side
- Jesus is a man, but a man with a womb
- H.D. picks up on all of this – Jesus as androgynous figure
- echoes of bi-sexuality
- Zinzendorf was interested in mysticism, union with God as sexual act
- intercourse is re-enactment of union with God, done with spirit of reverence, that is
- sacred sex important in Bethlehem
- sex is good even without procreating children
- sex not shameful, marriage consummation celebrated
- first sexual experience a blessing
- all of the above was what was repressed, but H.D. intuitively saw through it

- view of Holy Spirit, degenderized
- feminine aspect to their religion
- was central to Zinzendorf's theology
- something missing that H.D. realized
- Holy Spirit was a Mother, giver of life
- repression of Holy Spirit as Mother begins
- H.D. grasped essence of Zinzendorf in unity of masculine and feminine aspects of divinity and humanity
- she understood the Moravians had repressed what was central to the founding of Bethlehem and tried to reclaim that mystical tradition in her writings
- Moravians failed because they turned away from this radical theology which she hoped to reclaim in her poetry



The presence of a “Wunden Eiland” in the Monocacy where the Single Brothers “would gather after dark for singing and other rituals” and the stunning physicality of the “litany of the Wounds” cry out for further elaboration. So — shameless tease — look for a post on these things tomorrow. *And tomorrow night, of course, is Mary Foltz’s lecture. New dimensions to H.D. to learn. Don’t miss!*