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H.D. and the Image (review)

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prairies (prairie writers of East Asian, South Asian, and Central/Eastern European descent are ignored entirely).

I am not suggesting that the book should be summarily dismissed for its shortcomings—on the contrary, it offers several provocative and eloquent (re)readings of prairie literature. And because essay collections are selective by nature, they are bound to displease some readers while delighting others. Indeed, in anticipation of criticism from some of the displeased, Calder and Wardhaugh explain that “[o]f all the proposals [they] received in [their] call for papers on prairie topics, not one was on a text by an Aboriginal author” (10). But such a disclaimer, given the number of scholars in Canada with expertise on Aboriginal literature and culture, neither excuses the omission nor addresses the other problematic oversights of this collection. Ultimately, despite its ambitious objectives, *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* reinforces more than it challenges conventional ideas about prairie literature and as such should be approached with caution.

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Rachel Connor. *H.D. and the Image*.

Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004. 152 pp. \$79.95.

Rachel Connor’s new study, *H.D. and the Image*, provides a new and exciting examination of H.D.’s interest in the visual. Moving beyond the conception of H.D. as Imagiste, Connor explores H.D.’s involvement with avant-garde filmmaking, psychoanalysis, and spiritualism to analyze the interconnections of gender, sexuality, and subjectivity in her *oeuvre*. Drawing on work by film scholars, feminist philosophers, and gender and cultural studies theorists, *H.D. and the Image* offers readings of H.D.’s lesser known poetry and prose as well as contextualizes her interdisciplinary interests in film and spiritualism.

Most fascinating about Connor’s study is the attention it gives to H.D.’s preoccupation with European avant-garde cinema. H.D. worked as a film critic, actor, editor, and writer while she was involved with POOL Productions, an independent film company that Bryher founded in 1927 in collaboration with H.D. and Kenneth Macpherson (Bryher’s husband and H.D.’s lover at the time). H.D. also wrote reviews, theoretical essays,

and poems for its journal, *Close Up*. Connor provides a succinct summary of film history and situates the POOL production of *Borderline* within a tradition of avant-garde film being produced in Europe during the 1930s. Offering an insightful analysis of German expressionism and French impressionism, Connor examines H.D.'s influence by G. W. Pabst, one of Germany's most well-known expressionist directors, and Sergei Eisenstein, the Soviet director who spearheaded the montage school of filmmaking. Indeed, Connor links the impressionist concept *photogenie*—"the momentary flash of recognition or a moment when the look at something suddenly flares up with a particularly affective, emotional intensity" (25)—with H.D.'s own visionary experiences. She goes on to explore the contradictions inherent in H.D.'s film writings: at times, these writings embody an intellectual prejudice about commercial (read popular) filmmaking and at others an appreciation for the collectivity of spectatorship as well as an interest in such Hollywood stars as Greta Garbo and Louise Brooks. In this way, Connor offers a new way of looking at H.D., film connoisseur: H.D. as both avant-garde intellectualist and consumer of popular movies. This chapter in Connor's book is especially well researched and provides important new insights into H.D.'s enthusiasm for the moving image.

One of this study's early chapters traces the impact of the moving image on H.D.'s *Sea Garden* and *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Connor aligns H.D.'s attempt to capture the energy of the immediate present and the dynamism of the visual in her early Imagist poems with Joyce's epiphanies, Woolf's moments of being, and "the still point of the turning world" of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Situating H.D.'s early poetry in relation to the development of filmmaking in general, Connor explores the "cinematics" (36) of *Sea Garden* by exploring the stasis and dynamism inherent in the poems of that early collection. Cinematic techniques like inter-cutting and analytical editing are linked to the narrative flow between poems. Connor draws parallels between the palimpsestic technique that H.D. uses throughout her career and the inter-cutting and superimposition of images in early avant-garde film, especially Eisenstein's use of montage in *October*. Through the exploration of the formal and stylistic qualities that these two contemporaries—Eisenstein and H.D.—share, Connor provides a view of modernism that is distinctly interdisciplinary. More specifically, in her analysis of *Her* and *Nights*, two of H.D.'s cinematic texts, Connor develops a "queer theoretics" of the gaze that allows H.D. to explore issues of power and control surrounding the visual representation of the female body. In fact, H.D.'s engagement with the image allows her to resist

dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality through her emphasis on the erotics of the lesbian gaze.

In this study, Connor expands the conception of H.D., *Imagiste*, by acknowledging the heterogeneity of her writing and exploring H.D.'s representation of the image which mediates between and moves beyond such ideological binaries as highbrow/popular, aesthetic/politicized, private/collective (8). Most importantly, this study recognizes the blind spots that inhabit H.D.'s writing: the Eurocentrism present in her appropriation of mythology, for example, and her lack of engagement with Egyptian cultural history and politics in *Helen in Egypt*. Connor argues that, in giving a voice to Helen of Troy, H.D. can be seen as reaffirming the masculinist power that underlies mythological discourse and also as silencing the Egyptian resistance to British colonialism. Although acknowledging the important work that H.D.'s revisionist analyses of myth and history undoubtedly perform, Connor astutely points out that H.D. reinforces the cultural hegemony inherent in discourses of race, colonialism, and imperialism.

Toward the end of *H.D. and the Image*, Connor moves on to an examination of H.D.'s "visionary politics" of the 1940s, a new "way of seeing" that is marked by her desire to move beyond the boundaries of national identity and construct a community without borders (91). This interconnection of cinematic spectatorship and visionary experience is perhaps encouraged by the onset of World War II. For Connor, *The Gift* foregrounds H.D.'s desire to foster a spiritual collectivity influenced by the principles of community and equality that stem from her Moravian faith. The alternate spiritual dimension that H.D. accesses in *The Gift* is described with the terminology of film—literary analepsis is likened to cinematic flashback—and thus reinforces H.D.'s concerns with film, memory, and spirituality. During an air raid described in *The Gift*, for example, H.D. "is able to 'let pictures flow past and through me'" (96). In this way, Connor characterizes H.D. as both a spectator of spiritual images as well as an instrument through which these images are projected. By way of this analogy, Connor highlights the link between H.D.'s spiritual identity and her visionary politics and juxtaposes notions of collective spectatorship and private reception.

The sixth chapter of *H.D. and the Image* is both provocative and provoking. For Connor, H.D.'s exploration of spiritualism allows her (H.D.) to challenge orthodox constructions of gender and sexuality, provide a method for moving beyond entrenched conceptions of self and subjectivity, and surpass the elitism of the modernist literary establishment. Indeed, arguing that H.D.'s engagement with spiritualism undercuts her intellec-

tualized persona (115), Connor examines H.D.'s interest in the concepts of ritual and community inherent in popular spiritualism, especially in relation to the unpublished typescripts "The Sword Went Out to Sea" and "Majic Ring." Spirit transmissions allowed H.D. to reach a wider social community and to contest the dominant ideologies and power hierarchies that are bound up in heterosexual desire and orthodox Christianity (121–22). Tantalizing the reader with the links between the visual and the spiritual, Connor's study does not as successfully probe the depths of H.D.'s interest in popular spiritualism, especially in relation to her spiritualist narratives "The Sword Went Out to Sea" and "White Rose and the Red."

Connor freely acknowledges that H.D.'s challenges to normative formulations of sexuality and gender are undercut by a conservatism that can limit their radical potential: "What is revealed if we look at H.D.'s oeuvre is a *spectrum* of viewing experiences, containing within it a number of co-existing but conflicting political positions in relation to spectatorship" (109). H.D.'s exploration of film and spiritualism undoubtedly highlights the contradictory nature of her relationship to high modernism: although her interest in Hollywood cinema distinguishes her from the "aestheticised purism" (7) of some of her colleagues, her preference for European avant-garde film (with the preference given to form over content) is entirely in keeping with the at times elitist interests of canonized modernists.

H.D. and the Image is a brilliant addition to interdisciplinary analyses of H.D.'s oeuvre, however. In its examination of the interconnections between the visual, the spiritual, and the political, Rachel Connor's study provides important observations of H.D.'s involvement with *Close Up* and with popular and avant-garde filmmaking in general. Lucidly argued, *H.D. and the image* would be of use to any reader interested in H.D. and the visual and to most university libraries.

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Allan Pritchard. *English Biography in the Seventeenth Century: A Critical Survey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8020-3889-1. \$63.00.

This is such a rewarding subject that I'm surprised that no one has thought to tackle it in modern academic times; the last book entirely devoted to this topic was by Donald Stauffer back in 1930. One reason for neglect might be the lack of good editions of seventeenth-century biographies,