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A Curious Peril: H.D.'s Late Modernist Prose. By LARA VETTER. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2017. xii+265 pp. \$79.95. ISBN 978-0-8130-5456-8.

R05890 H.D.'s later poetry has received considerable attention from modernist and H.D. scholars alike, but her prose of the late 1940s and 1950s continues to challenge those seeking to engage with it and position it in a broader literary context. An experienced H.D. scholar, Lara Vetter has produced a considerable contribution to our understanding of H.D.'s scope and interests during her creative renaissance ignited by the Second World War. Vetter's main contention is that the prose H.D. wrote during the last two decades of her life is consistently late modernist in its attention to global, ethical, and political issues. Vetter claims H.D., long considered a modernist writer of interior experience, as a late modernist writer whose prose, especially between 1945 and 1950, deals with topics of 'war, gender, nation, and empire' (p. 20), and creates fragmented forms through which to capture 'the fragility and instability of the boundaries between present and past, but also self and othering' (p. 170). The autobiographical H.D. recedes and a more outward-facing H.D. takes the late modernist stage under the guise of her *nom de plume*, Delia Alton. Delia is a 'curious' writer—'artistic, clever, detailed, attentive, intricate, skilful' (p. 3). She is a writer still experimenting with her craft, moving from a more pessimistic outlook in the late 1940s to a mellower, ethical perspective in the 1950s; who envisions 'a world without national borders' (p. 158), and a psychoanalytic relationship which 'yields an interpretation tailored to a unique individual and without recourse to an overarching meta-narrative like the Oedipal complex' (p. 186).

Formed of three parts plus an Interlude, *A Curious Peril* devotes considerable space to a detailed analysis of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, while texts such as *The Mystery* and *White Rose and the Red* receive less attention. In the first part, Vetter positions *Sword* as a thoroughly late modernist text trembling from the shocks, or the peril, of the Second World War, magnifying the text's 'utter hopelessness about the possibility of healing self and community' (p. 39). It is a text that breaks the seams of generic boundaries, merging autobiography, time travel, fairy story, and historical fiction. Part 2 sets itself the ambitious task of showing how the H.D. of the late 1940s was a trenchant critic of British imperialism, of the time of Shakespeare (in *By Avon River*), and during the Crimean War and Sepoy Rebellion of the 1850s (in *White Rose and the Red*). An Interlude reads *The Mystery* as an exploration of doubling, via a complex psychoanalytic discourse drawn in part from James Grotstein. Part 3 continues the theme of psychoanalysis but argues that in the 1950s H.D. used espionage as a trope to reconfigure her attitude to the therapeutic relationship, offering more support for existential psychoanalysis than Freudian. A Coda offers a brief rereading of H.D.'s memoir of Ezra Pound, *End to Torment*.

A Curious Peril is exquisitely researched, perhaps excessively so. Vetter's most persuasive chapter, on the psychoanalyst as spy, succeeds so well because it avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier chapters. Her overarching commitment to placing H.D.'s prose of the 1940s and 1950s in a late modernist context means that there are frequent deviations from H.D.'s primary texts; there are too few sustained

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passages of close reading, and the emphasis is very much on creating an elaborate historical and theoretical framework against which H.D.'s texts are evaluated afresh. Beyond an immediate readership of H.D. scholars, *A Curious Peril* therefore seems of particular interest to those keen on developing the concept of late modernism.

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