

HMU: Dialogues

Harrison Middleton University

5/13/2020

Volume 7, Edition 1

Letter from the Editor:

Welcome to our spring 2020 newsletter! Thank you for your interest in Harrison Middleton University news.

Revisiting the fall newsletter was a stark reminder of the major changes that have upended many of our daily lives. Our first concern is always for your health and safety. We wish you the best, despite the many challenges ahead. I do not know what changes you face specifically, but many of us are navigating canceled conferences, unknown futures, work-at-home environments, and a lot of teleconferencing. Whatever is your new norm, we hope that you are able to make the most of it. And through it all, we wish you good health!

Despite the changes, this newsletter showcases a number of exciting things. First, we welcome the 2020 Fellows in Ideas and new Tutors (see page 7). You will also find three book reviews on diverse topics. Although travel to conferences has been cancelled or postponed, there are always opportunities over the phone and online. See our July Quarterly Discussion opportunity on page 3. Finally, read about our current Outstanding Graduate on page 5.

We wish you health and comfort. Stay safe and strong. And, as always, thank you for your participation!

~ *Alissa*



Reviews and More:

The following book review is by Fellow in Ideas **Minette Bryant**. Also find a review by **Dean Coslovi** on page 4 and **Dylan O'Hara** on page 6.

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The Other Bennet Sister
by Janice Hadlow

If it took me all of twelve days to complete Janice Hadlow's new novel, it is only because my family and work obligations wouldn't allow me to simply stay in bed until I'd read it all. I preordered this book as soon as I became aware of it, and the minute it was released on March 30, I began devouring it as hungrily as anyone who has waited their whole life for a new Jane Austen novel.

Not exactly a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, Hadlow's *The Other Bennet Sister* revisits the story we already love, but through the eyes of Mary Bennett, the "lost sister" in the Bennet family. In Austen's original novel, the reader gets a keen picture of Jane and Elizabeth, their lives and their bond, and we also see a clear snapshot of Lydia and Kitty, their silliness and their sparkle...but Mary is simply ignored. Ignored by her family and ignored by the author.

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Review (continued):

The Other Bennet Sister begins not where *Pride and Prejudice* leaves off, but instead years before. It begins in Mary's childhood, beautifully illustrating how a quiet, investigative soul would suffer under the harsh disappointment of the overbearing Mrs. Bennet (especially after the unforgivable sin of requiring spectacles!), and in the shadow of her glowingly beautiful and noteworthy older sisters. It isn't until about chapter twenty that Hadlow's novel crosses into the beginning of Austen's.

I found it warmly exciting to revisit the events of *Pride and Prejudice*, though from the perspective of Mary's quiet watchfulness, her awkward attempts to join with the family and not provoke her mother's nerves.

But then it jumps forward in time, and we follow Mary on a journey of her own self exploration, and this is where the novel truly shines. Though Hadlow keeps to the lovely, lilting style of Jane Austen, this is not at all a re-telling of a well-loved story. This is an adventure all its own, but through a countryside we know and love.

Once twenty-year-old Mary is out from under the thumb of her mother and the shadow of her sisters, she must discover for herself who she is and what sort of life she will choose. Her evolution from the dowdy, overlooked spinster-in-the-making to the firmly self-assured young woman at the end of the book is gradual, step by step, and utterly believable.

An interesting element of the story is that, because Mary is determinedly studious, the reader is taken on an excursion into the literature she studies. When Mary is excited about Aristotle, we get to share that excitement, and when Mary finds herself lost in Wordsworth, we are treated to the full emotional impact the poetry has on Mary, and on the person she is becoming.

Throughout the novel, we are treated to visits with characters that we know and love from Austen's world. Notably, in *The Other Bennet Sister*, we see a lot more of Charlotte Lucas (Collins) and Mr. and Mrs. Gardner (Mr. Gardner being Mrs. Bennet's brother) who play a major role in Mary's "becoming." But to me, the most surprising and memorable of them all is the revisiting of Mr. Collins, the cousin who was merely a mockable caricature in *Pride and Prejudice*, but has the opportunity to be fully human in this new novel; we get to see inside his goofy awkwardness to the man who is trying so painfully hard to be the best he can.

If there is an identifiable theme to *The Other Bennet Sister*, it can be summed up in the line from Aristotle that Mary seizes upon and returns to repeatedly for strength: "Happiness depends upon ourselves." Armed with this bit of wisdom, Mary Bennet steps out of the shadow of classic literature to reinvent herself in a world which we already know and love. Get ready to love Jane Austen all over again.

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Faculty Highlights:

~ **Alissa Simon** attended the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association's conference in Albuquerque, NM on February 19-22, 2020. She presented a paper titled "Comedians in Aldgate Sipping Mead: How Chaucer's Humor Translates into Modern Day." She also read a selection of poetry, titled "The Archetypal Tree" during a creative writing panel.

July Quarterly Discussion

You are invited to join HMU students and staff for a discussion of a selection of *The Federalist Papers*. We have discussion opportunities on either Thursday, July 16 at 4 pm PDT or Saturday, July 18 at 9 am PDT. Email Alissa at asimon@hmu.edu for more information or to register.

Student Corner



~ Congratulations to Dr. **Minette Bryant**, who earned her Doctor of Arts with a concentration in Imaginative Literature. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Arts, Dr. Bryant submitted a novel titled *Seeking Samuel*. Harrison Middleton University also congratulates Dr. **Minette Bryant** on her induction into the Delta Epsilon Tau Honor Society, the premier national honor society for America's accredited distance learning institutions. The Society encourages and recognizes superior student achievement, character, and leadership.

~ Dr. **Minette Bryant** also recently wrote and directed a musical in her local community, which can be accessed here: <https://mediazilla.com/MACRjvh6wU>



Minette Bryant is also a 2020 Harrison Middleton University Fellow in Ideas. See her book review on pages 1 and 2 of this newsletter.

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Book Review: *The End is Always Near: Apocalyptic Moments, from the Bronze Age Collapse to Nuclear Near Misses*, by Dan Carlin

Reviewed by 2020 Fellow in Ideas, Dean Coslovi



Everyone has had the anxious experience of waiting for the power to be restored after an outage. Although it is inconvenient, such an occurrence is unlikely to cause anyone a great deal of existential angst or dramatically impact our lives. But what if the power didn't come back on for say a week? How seriously would this affect the normal functioning of society? Probably a great deal. Now consider what would happen if power was never fully restored. This brief thought experiment is the manner through which author Dan Carlin sets the stage for his analysis of life in Western Europe after the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire.

Fans of Carlin's *Hardcore History* podcast will be familiar with Carlin's unique approach to historical analysis. This approach seamlessly blends historical narratives with storytelling. In this way, Carlin is able to captivate readers so that they often find themselves forgetting that they are reading about real historical events. When such incidences occur, Carlin masterfully drives the historical narratives home by posing interesting thought experiments that reaffirm the reality of these events.

In *The End is Always Near*, Carlin relates instances in history when humanity has encountered the metaphorical "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." Throughout the book, Carlin touches upon cases of societal destruction due to conquest, devastating plagues that have ravaged humanity, times of scarcity, and the ever present threat of mass extinction faced by our species. Carlin uses these extreme historical events to contrast human experiences in the past with the lifestyles that we enjoy in our technologically advanced and stable societies today. These stark contrasts bring the fragility of our modern lifestyles into focus. Fortunately, Carlin's writing presents readers with a choice: to believe that the modern world lives under the Sword of Damocles or to recognize that we live in the greatest age that humanity has ever known.

In closing, this book is a wondrous intersection of history, philosophy, and anthropology recounted by a masterful storyteller. Those unfamiliar with Carlin's work should do themselves a favor and pick up a copy of *The End is Always Near*. Longtime Carlin fans are advised to do the same as they will not be disappointed.

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Meet an Outstanding Graduate:

Doctorate from Harrison Middleton University helped to advance his teaching career

Peter Ponzio, Doctor of Arts, is a Tutor of imaginative literature and social sciences at Harrison Middleton University and teaches finance at the School of Continuing and Professional Education at Loyola University of Chicago. His studies at Harrison Middleton University led to his employment at Loyola University and his appointment as Tutor at Harrison Middleton University.



Dr. Ponzio graduated from Loyola University with a bachelor's degree in English literature and received his CPA license shortly after graduating from Loyola. He worked for thirty-five years in various financial positions and retired to pursue his goal of continuing his education in order to teach. He earned a master's degree from Northwestern University and a second master's degree in the humanities and a doctoral degree in humanities from Harrison Middleton University with an emphasis on imaginative literature and social sciences.

Harrison Middleton allowed Dr. Ponzio to set up his own program of study, which was comprised of two broad time frames: imaginative literature and philosophy from Homer through Dante and a second time frame which focused on imaginative literature, psychology and social sciences from Chaucer and Erasmus through Sigmund Freud. Dr. Ponzio's Capstone on Charles Dickens was adapted for publication by McFarland & Company, a leading publisher of academic non-fiction, and is titled *Themes in Dickens: Seven Recurring Concerns in the Writings*. Dr. Ponzio's interest in Charles Dickens has led to several other publications in academic journals.

"Harrison Middleton University is a Great Books institution and coursework is designed around the Great Books of the Western World. All work is performed based upon an analysis of the primary texts, which encourages students to interact with the text, their tutor, and the author." ~ Dr. Peter Ponzio

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A Grand Welcome



This spring, we have welcomed a number of voices into the conversation. First, let us welcome the 2020 Fellows in Ideas, six new voices for our blog and newsletters. We are excited to hear about their ideas and areas of interest. Please welcome Fellows in Ideas: Minette Bryant, Francisco Contreras, Dean Coslovi, Turkey Gasimova, Taiwo Oguntuyo, and Dylan O'Hara.

Secondly, we are excited to welcome some new Tutors as well. You may have already had a conversation with them, but join us in an official welcome to Peter Ponzio, Edgar Daniels, and Susan Chamberlin. We are fortunate to have such wonderful talents who are interested in discussing great works with us.

Book Review: *Smelertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community*, by Monica Perales

Reviewed by 2020 Fellow in Ideas, Dylan O'Hara

In *Smelertown*, Monica Perales writes a new history of borderland life, chronicling the lives and memories of Chicano El Pasoans working at and living near The American Smelting and Mining Company (ASARCO). In compiling an urban history of El Paso around ASARCO, Perales reveals new insights about the struggles, successes, and resistances of smelter workers and their families. As smelter workers, Mexican-American labor organizers lobbied for better pay, safer working conditions, and more affordable goods at the ASARCO company store. In their community downstream from the ASARCO plant, El Bajo, Mexican and Mexican-American teachers, priests, mothers, and older sisters founded schools and churches, held tutoring sessions, and offered women's refining lessons. These El Bajo community members fostered



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Review Continued:

intimate community relations and a tight knit network of friends and families that eventually came to fight against racial segregation in El Paso and against ASARCO's abuses. Both as a collective and as individuals, El Bajo's community members both built and fought for the rights of their neighborhood. As a gifted writer, Perales brings El Bajo to life, bringing us into a vivid reconstruction of life on the US-Mexico border.

Adding complexity to this urban history of the segregation of El Bajo was ASARCO's toxic groundwater runoff. Contamination from the ASARCO plant both negatively effected El Paso's air quality and ecologically devastated El Bajo, which lay at the bottom of a hill below the ASARCO plant. ASARCO's violation of the 1967 Air Safety Code caused the plant to shut down, in an effort to stave off environmental damage in El Paso. But the solution to ecological damage did not always align with El Bajo's community wishes. At the same time that the neighborhood suffered from the effects of blatant environmental racism, esmeltianos did not condone the closing of ASARCO or the subsequent destruction of their neighborhood. El Bajo community members sought different solutions, ones that would preserve their smelter jobs, their home, and their collectivity.

As an homage to the power and beauty of memory, *Smelertown* confronts the El Bajo residents' memories of their home. Perales' oral histories round out the aching beauty of El Paso and its landscape, as well as El Bajo's hardships. As such, *Smelertown* deeply considers the origins of community memories alongside the history of ASARCO. The result is Perales' wonderful consideration of the endless interplay between lived experience, nostalgia, and collective memory. Thus, at the same time that ASARCO defined and dictated racial segregation and struggle in El Paso, El Bajo's Mexican community members created their own group identity, their own home, and their own set of fond memories. It is those memories and experiences Perales does justice to.

Harrison Middleton University is a great ideas, great works, great conversations, distance learning university that offers graduate education in the humanities with concentrations in imaginative literature, natural science, philosophy and religion, and social science. Harrison Middleton University promotes student-faculty scholarship through research, discussion, and the development of collaborative publications.