

HMU: Dialogues

Harrison Middleton University

5/6/2021

Volume 8, Edition 1

Letter from the Editor:

Welcome to 2021! We hope that you are well, that you are reading, and that you will have time to join us for an event or two in the upcoming year. Find information about our upcoming Quarterly Discussion on page five. Also, look for more fall and winter events on our website at hmu.edu.

We just concluded our recent film series, which was a tremendous hit. Thanks to Gary Schoepfel for leading such a fantastic set of discussions. Look for more information on the next film series in late fall and in the next newsletter.

In addition to events, we also want to remind our students about some excellent resources at HMU. For example, did you know that you can schedule additional tutor discussions? Page four offers more information about this opportunity. We will also continue to highlight resources from the HMU library in upcoming newsletters (see page three). We hope that you will find this information useful.

Finally, help us to welcome the 2021 Fellows in Ideas. HMU is fortunate to be connected with such a diverse group of scholars. We look forward to their blog ideas and book reviews. For more information on the Fellowship in Ideas, please read the final page of today's newsletter and visit hmu.edu.

We hope to hear from you. In the meantime, be well and keep reading!

~ Alissa



Reviews and More:

The following book review is by Fellow in Ideas **Rebecca Thacker**.

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Solomon, Rivers. *The Deep*. Saga. 2020.

"Our mothers were pregnant African women/Thrown overboard while crossing the Atlantic Ocean on slave ships/We were born breathing water as we did in the womb/We built our home on the sea floor/Unaware of the two-legged surface dwellers/Until their world came to destroy ours."

– Clipping, "The Deep"

The 2019 novella *The Deep* is a richly imagined, deeply moving Afrofuturist novel by 32-year-old Rivers Solomon, whom many call a successor to Octavia Butler. Solomon also is the author of *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017) and *Sorrowland* (May 2021).

Inspired by the song "The Deep" by rap group Clipping, Solomon's novella envisions an underwater society created by the water-breathing descendants of pregnant African women thrown overboard during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

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Review (continued):

These murders are well-documented; the most well-known arguably is the 1781 mass drowning of more than 130 enslaved Africans by the white male crew of the British slave ship *Zong*. Because enslaved African people were held as chattel property, slavers threw “problematic” cargo, such as pregnant females, overboard so that their companies might save supplies, make insurance claims on dead cargo, and otherwise cut their economic losses.

In *The Deep*, Solomon imagines that these pregnant women’s children did not drown when their mothers did. Instead, the children have adapted and thrived underwater, building a complex underwater society – the wajinru. For the wajinru, the trauma of their origins is too painful to bear, so they choose one individual each generation to be the “historian” responsible for carrying the collective memories of all wajinru from the beginning of time. This allows the rest to live their lives blissfully unaware of their unspeakable past. Each year all wajinru return home for the “remembering.” The historian returns this history to them, and they absorb the value of the memories before again becoming unaware when the historian re-collects the memories to hold until the next remembering.

As the novella opens, Yetu, the wajinru’s current historian, struggles with the immense pain and burden of carrying these memories alone. She is being consumed by them. Lost in the trauma of the past and unable to be her own person, Yetu wastes away slowly. During the ceremony of remembering, Yetu gives the memories to the wajinru but, unable to bear the thought of resuming their burden, she flees, leaving the wajinru to shoulder the memories alone. As the story progresses, Yetu must make an agonizing decision – will she abandon her role as historian to save herself or will she return to retake the memories, allowing the wajinru to continue their tradition of collective forgetfulness?

Afrofuturist novels can offer a corrective to the extraordinary efforts European enslavers took to ensure captive Africans and their descendants were entirely cut off from their communities, histories, and memories. In her 2006 memoir *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Saidiya Hartman argues that to be enslaved is to “lose your mother,” (your past, culture, and country). But speculative literature, in this case Afrofuturist fiction such as *The Deep*, can re-envision these lost stories, filling in gaps and crafting pasts for diasporic peoples whose histories have been erased. In the hands of Rivers Solomon, a tragic history rooted in kidnapping and genocide is transformed into a story of survival, collectivity, and hope.

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“The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.”

~ Robert M. Hutchins

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Review (continued):

The Deep's wajinru can be read as a metaphor for the people of the African diaspora – descendants of the enslaved have lost their mothers; they *are* the wajinru. These descendants were not meant to survive, but they have. *The Deep* asks, what relationship should these descendants have with their history? The novel argues that although chattel slavery may have ended in the 1860s, the residue of this sordid history is still here, influencing individuals and our collective society. Solomon addresses the potential power of collectivity in a 2019 *Publisher's Weekly Interview*: "The heart of the message in *The Deep* is to turn to and build community. Our real-life communities, especially marginalized communities, are often wounded by physical realities. It's important not to become isolated, like Yetu does. We can bear more together and do more together." The ramifications of chattel slavery must be addressed and processed, but, like Yetu and the wajinru, we all must shoulder the burden collectively.

Highlights from The Willis Speight Harrison Athenaeum Online Library



We hope you have taken some time to explore Harrison Middleton University's Online Library. In upcoming newsletters we will feature resources contained within the Online Library. Access these resources in the drop-down menu. For example:

~You can log in to the HMU Online Library from the University's homepage: www.hmu.edu

~JSTOR continues to expand its Open Community Collection, which features freely accessible primary source materials in a wide variety of subjects contributed by libraries, museums, and archives.

~HMU compiled the Humanities Listservs and Professional Organizations list, which offers information about conference participation and publishing opportunities. Also, talk with other students and faculty who have similar interests.

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Student Corner

~ Please help to congratulate **Cody Kuhlken**, who successfully earned a Master of Arts. Mr. **Kuhlken** submitted the following Capstone in partial fulfillment of his Master of Arts Degree requirement: "English Language Arts in the Era of Alternative Facts."

~ Please join us in congratulating **Dr. James Thurman**, who successfully earned a Master of Arts. For his Capstone Dr. **Thurman** created a college-level humanities course, Science Fiction and Futurism, in partial fulfillment of his Master of Arts degree requirement.

~ Congratulations to Dr. **Austin Scott**, who successfully earned a Doctor of Arts. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Arts, Dr. Scott developed a series of poems, "Along Unfamiliar Paths."

~ Alumnus Dr. **Michael Caba** wrote a chapter about Zoroastrianism in *The Popular Handbook of World Religions* from Harvest House Publishers. You can find it here:

<https://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/books/popular-handbook-of-world-religions-9780736979092>

~ Congratulations to Dr. **Alissa Simon**, who successfully earned a Doctor of Arts. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Arts, Dr. **Simon** submitted a series of poems titled "Text(ure)."

~ **Cody Kuhlken**, **Austin Scott**, and **Alissa Simon** have all been inducted into the Delta Epsilon Tau Honor Society.

Did You Know?

Did you know that you can schedule an additional ungraded discussion with tutors?

Students also have the opportunity to schedule short, informal, ungraded discussions with Tutors in order to further discuss authors, ideas, topics, or subtopics that they wish to briefly explore. These discussions are typically 20 to 30 minutes in length and are limited to no more than one per course. Supplementary discussions will be scheduled through the Assignments Mailbox using the same format as regular discussion requests, and should include two dates and times the student is available to talk. Supplementary discussions may be scheduled to occur at any time during the course and do not require the 5-business-day wait. Students should specify which Tutor they wish to speak with and provide a brief description of what they would like to discuss.

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Faculty Highlights:

~ **Peter Ponzio's** essay entitled "Dickens and Society: Can Dickens' 'Uppers' change their Minds?" will be included in the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Class*. The book will be released on September 2, 2021 but can be preordered now. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Literature-and-Class/McMillan/p/book/9780367442118>

~ **Joseph Coulson** attended the virtual National Humanities Alliance annual conference in March, and on the final day of the conference, he met via Zoom with Arizona senators and congressional representatives, lobbying alongside members of the NHA in its first virtual Advocacy Day, arguing for higher levels of funding for programs, agencies, and institutions funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

~ HMU faculty members **Joseph Coulson, Alissa Simon, Rebecca Fisher, Marcus Conley and Peter Ponzio** joined HMU 2020 Fellows in Ideas **Taiwo Oguntuyo and Dylan O'Hara** for the virtual Great Books Chicago in March.

~ **Lauren Guthrie** earned her Executive Juris Doctor - Education Law from Concord Law School at Purdue University Global.

~ **Marcus Conley** attended the Modern Language Association (MLA) virtual Convention in January.

~ In January, **Rebecca Fisher** led a virtual seminar for Classical Pursuits on George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

~ In April, **Alissa Simon** attended a seminar on the poetry of Louise Glück, hosted by poet Jeredith Merrin. She also attended the Colby College Virtual Fall Institute: Poetry and Short Story in November. Alissa also wrote a featured article for Oh, The Humanities titled "Humanities: The Space for Big Questions." <https://oth.thirdchapter.org/features/humanities-the-space-for-big-questions>

~ **Michael Curd** attended a virtual event with the Society of International Business Fellows (SIBF).

July Quarterly Discussion:



Everyone is welcome to join the Quarterly Discussion series. Consider spending 1.5 hours discussing excerpts. Materials are online and discussions take place on Zoom. We would love to hear from you!

The next discussion will focus on Social Science. We have space available on either Thursday, May 15, 2021 at 4 pm PDT or Saturday, July 17, 2021 at 9 am PDT. Email asimon@hmu.edu for more information or to join.

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Meet the Harrison Middleton University 2021 Fellows in Ideas:



Alexander Calhoun: Alex majored in English and Creative Writing at Columbia University. When his first daughter was born (first of three), Alex began teacher training in Illinois and began working at Carmel Montessori Academy teaching ages 6-18.

Gabriel E. Etienne (Gabriel Evans): Currently a Master's student at the University of Arkansas, Gabriel is interested in social structures such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion and their effect on identity formation.

Minha Nisar: Minha hails from the Indian Occupied Kashmir, which is a disputed territory nestled between three of the nuclear powers of Asia. The need to make sense of living in a place which is highly politically charged led her to pursue a Master's in Political Science.

Rebecca Thacker: Currently a doctoral candidate and Charles Phelps Taft Fellow in Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Cincinnati, Rebecca has also been selected as a 2021-2022 P.E.O. Scholar. In April 2021, she chaired a panel titled "Bicultural Personas: Crossings of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Multiethnic Literature" at the Society for the Study of Multiethnic Literatures of the United States. She also presented a paper, "A New Type of Indian: Native American Perspectives on 'The Indian Problem,' 1880-1928." Rebecca also presented a section of her dissertation, "Women in a Man's (Science Fiction) World, A Reappropriation of the Genre," at the annual Taft Research Fellows Conference.

Jaya Upadhyay: Jaya's self-proclaimed weakness is similar to Tennyson's Ulysses: "roaming with a hungry heart." She has a Ph.D. in English Literature and is interested about the world within as well as the world around her. An unabashed feminist, she focuses on consciousness and existentialism.

Kyle Williams: Currently a Master's student at Rollins College, Kyle studies Complexity Theory in hopes of building a better pedagogy for 21st-century education. He is an engineering undergraduate who stumbled on the Great Books at a local library and fell in love with liberal education.

**Find more information on these outstanding Fellows in Ideas at: hmu.edu/fellowship-in-ideas*