

HMU: Dialogues

Harrison Middleton University

11/17/2021

Volume 8, Edition 2

Letter from the Editor:

The holiday season approaches more quickly every year. Take a moment to put your feet up and relax as you read about peers and friends, about upcoming opportunities, and new pieces of literature in today's newsletter.

First, we must thank our 2021 Fellows in Ideas and wish them well for the future. They came to us from around the world, and we are grateful for their blog and newsletter contributions, especially considering the crazy circumstances for so many.

Secondly, if you are interested in spending time in a virtual conversation with us, consider attending the next Quarterly Discussion or Film Series. You will find more details about upcoming events in this newsletter and at hmu.edu. Join us as we start 2022 with interesting and relevant conversations.

Today's newsletter also includes three very diverse film and literature reviews. Also, take note of all of the wonderful achievements of students and staff. Keep in mind that we love to spread good news. Send an email to Alissa at asimon@hmu.edu with professional updates. Also feel free to reach out with any comments or questions. Emails are always welcome.

We wish you health, comfort, family and friends, a happy holiday season, and, of course, a good book to read. As always, thank you for your participation!



~ Alissa

Reviews and More:

The following book review is by Fellow in Ideas Alex Calhoun.

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Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism
ascribed to Valentin Tomberg

Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism is the work of a great reconciler. These figures appear when some new body of knowledge, when some great insight or edifice of thought must be reconciled with the Christian Tradition. St. Thomas Aquinas is the most obvious example of such a figure, reconciling the insights of Aristotle, and through him the best of the Greek philosophical tradition, with the Catholic Faith. This type, though, is not limited to the Angelic Doctor. A list of such thinkers might begin with St. John the Apostle who unlocked the cosmic implications of the Logos, and end with Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, whose Catholic Worker Movement reconciled the Anarchism of Peter Kropotkin with the personalism of St. Francis of Assisi.

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Review (continued)

Valentin Tomberg, the true author of *Meditations* who is identified in the book merely as “your friend from beyond the grave,” took on an even more dangerous task when he attempted to reconcile what insights he could from the fringes of German and French Romanticism and Esotericism with orthodox Catholicism. Authors such as Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy, an esoteric Christian movement that today still operates the Waldorf schools, and Joséphin Péladan, Papus, and Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, all French esotericists, are quoted liberally in the text, as well as the Hermetic Emerald Table, various Cabbalistic writers, Plato and Plotinus. In this startling book, Tomberg takes these disparate streams, many subterranean and even occult, and brings whatever is good in them into harmony with Scripture, the Saints and Catholic Tradition through a series of 22 ‘meditations’ on the major arcana of the Tarot of Marseilles.

Valentin Tomberg’s biography well-suited him to this unique undertaking. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on February 26, 1900, Tomberg was raised a Lutheran. As a young man, he gravitated to the Theosophy of Helena Blavatsky, moved from this to the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, explored Russian Orthodoxy, but finally entered the Catholic Church after the Second World War. In 1920, he found his mother tied to a tree and shot by communist revolutionaries in a forest near their home in Estonia. During the war, he was part of the Dutch anti-Nazi resistance and studied law, receiving a PhD in Jurisprudence from the University of Cologne; during the Cold War, he lived in England and translated Soviet broadcasts for the BBC. He died in 1973, his life spanning some of the most turbulent and violent decades of the last 2000 years. Yet, while the world seemed to fall apart around him, Tomberg worked and prayed, gleaning truth wherever he found himself, teaching courses and giving lectures, and finally bringing all that he had learned along the way into harmony with the Catholic Tradition that he finally united himself to.

The book, 658 pages in English from the French, is massive. Its form is unique, using each of the images of the Tarot arcana to initiate a ‘letter,’ addressing the reader as ‘Dear Unknown Friend.’ The writer moves, by means of analogy, from the particulars of each picture to its message, connecting it to various great thinkers of the East and the West, and ultimately arriving at profound insight into some aspect of Christian truth, descending and ascending again and again from the concrete particulars of the card to sublime spiritual insight. The book is an immersion in a completely different way of thinking. The three monastic vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity, the Virgin Mary, the *Pater Noster*, the Trinity, the Hierarchy, the Angels, the Saints, the words and person of Jesus Christ-- all are explored as Tomberg meditates on each of the Tarot images. Following the ebb and flow of Tomberg’s thoughts is thrilling. You will be left dazzled by the author’s brilliance, moved by his sincerity, often shocked at his startling insights and connections, and perhaps wiser for being dunked into this great river of thought.

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Meet Our Outstanding Graduate for 2021: Austin L. Scott

In 2018, he earned a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. A Ronald E. McNair Scholar, in 2008 Austin was also class salutatorian at Livingstone College, where he received his Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. He is a Christian missionary, entrepreneur, and human services professional with experience in education, workforce development, and international development. Austin is also an author, having published several books, essays, and research articles. His essay, "Expectancy, Goal-Setting, and Reinforcement: Behavioral Theories and their Application in the Workplace" was recognized as being in the top ten percent of all essays downloaded for 2021 on the Social Science Research Network.



Since completing his doctoral work at HMU, he has written and published a new book titled, *Between Christ and the Black Man: A Conversation on Race, Politics, and the Church in America*. He has also been invited by fellow scholars to submit an essay addressing the Black experience in America for an anthology soon to be released by an academic press. Austin continues to serve his local community, and has plans to travel overseas this year to resume his missionary work. He hopes to use his doctorate to pursue new writing opportunities and to open doors for more African-Americans to become internationalized.

IN THE WORDS OF DR. SCOTT

"The Administrative team is outstanding, and the faculty and staff are excellent. The liberal arts education at HMU trains students to synthesize and generalize the ideas of scholars and experts from various fields – past and present – to develop alternative solutions to seemingly intractable problems."

~ Dr. Austin L. Scott

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Student and Graduate Corner



~ Congratulations to **Dr. Richard Whitesel**, who earned his Doctor of Arts at Harrison Middleton University. Dr. Whitesel submitted the following Capstone in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Arts requirement, "Two Monks, Some Beer, and the Creation of the First Lutheran State in Europe." Richard has been inducted into 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.

~ Congratulations to **James Keller** who successfully completed a Master of Arts at Harrison Middleton University. Mr. Keller submitted the following Capstone in partial fulfillment of his Master of Arts requirement, "Reflections on the Seven Noahide Laws." James is also a part of the Delta Tau Honor Society.

~ **Ellin Iselin's** Capstone project, a film titled *Soul in the Machine*, has been selected as a participant in the upcoming Cinema of Nations. <https://filmfreeway.com/CINEMAOFNATIONS>

Fellows Updates



~ **Alex Calhoun**, a 2021 HMU Fellow in Ideas, was hired as a Montessori Teacher Trainer at the Midwest Montessori Teacher Training Center.

~ **Rebecca Thacker**, a 2021 HMU Fellow in Ideas, has been selected as a 2021-22 P.E.O. Scholar by the International Chapter of the P.E.O. Sisterhood. The P.E.O. Scholar Awards are one-time, competitive, merit-based awards intended to recognize and encourage academic excellence and achievement by women in doctoral-level programs. In April 2021, Rebecca 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 the Multiethnic Literatures of the United States (MELUS) national conference. She 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 Center Fellows Conference. Rebecca's autoethnography, "I'm Going Back to School: A Forty-something Urban Appalachian and the Academy," has been selected for publication in *Autoethnographies of Doctoral Students in the United States*, a part of the Doctoral Journey in Education Series. Publication date is June 2023.

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Faculty Highlights

~ **Joseph Coulson** published "Advocating for Empathy" in *Oh, The Humanities!*:

<https://oth.thirdchapter.org/features/advocating-for-empathy/> .

~ Joseph Coulson led a HMU Continuing Education discussion on Hemingway's "Indian Camp" and "The End of Something" on November 16th.

~ **Alissa Simon** published "Humanities: The Space for Big Questions" in *Oh, The Humanities!*:

<https://oth.thirdchapter.org/features/humanities-the-space-for-big-questions/> .

~ **Susan Chamberlin** attended St. John's College, Summer Classics Virtual Seminar, *A Village Life*, by Louise Gluck, July 5-9, 2021.

~ Dr. **Rebecca Fisher** earned her Doctor of Arts at Harrison Middleton University. Dr. **Fisher** submitted the following Capstone in partial fulfillment of her Doctor of Arts requirement, "The Poetry of Nature and Nature of Poetry: A reading and discussion program for homeless youth."

HMU Quarterly Discussions

Did you know that Harrison Middleton University holds Quarterly Discussions which are open to students, staff, friends, and members of the public? Join us for the next discussion on either **Thursday, January 20** or **Saturday, January 22, 2022**. Conducted on Zoom, these 1.5 hour long discussions connect you with others who are interested in great literature and great conversation. Email asimon@hmu.edu for more information. Thanks to groups like these, we are able to speak to folks all over the world!



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Film Review: To the Bone

The following is a film review by Fellow in Ideas Jaya Upadhyay (originally published at hmu.edu on October 15, 2021)

To the Bone (2017), a Netflix film, opens with two potent sequences. The first is a scene in which two stick-like figures emerge from the backdrop and approach the screen. These are women engaged in an eating disorder treatment program where the lead character, Ellen (Lily Collins) is enrolled. The second scene shows Ellen being weighed in her underclothes while her step mother Susan (Carrie Preston) questions her, "Do you think that's beautiful?" These visuals aesthetically introduce the subject that the film is about to discuss. The film is notable because it not only follows the primary character's journey from suffering to recovery, but also from denial to acceptance of her situation as something that needs to be remedied. It is not cluttered with melancholy states of persons with disorders, but instead depicts these folks in everyday situations, joking, hanging out, even enjoying a baby shower, and so on. This technique, utilized by director Marti Noxon, is impressive in that it does not put the narrative inside a box and tag it, but instead puts it on a sort of picture board. With the exception of the romance sub plot, which becomes a distraction, one may give the film a thumbs up for not veering into tedium or melodrama.

When Ellen is expelled from the first treatment program due to her belligerent attitude, Susan coaxes her to try again, this time with an unconventional medical practitioner, Dr. Beckham (Keanu Reeves). She enters "Threshold," – an in-patient facility that is a part of the doctor's treatment – only because opposing it would have resulted in her being kicked out of her father's house. Judy (Lili Taylor), Ellen's mother, is introduced during a family therapy session at the facility. She lives at a horse therapy farm in Phoenix with her partner, Olive (Brooke Smith). It is the only scene in the film where we see high drama, with Susan and Judy accusing each other of being responsible for Ellen's condition. Judy, who previously abandoned Ellen, appears helpless. In fact, her abandonment may have even been a catalyst toward Ellen's anorexia. Ellen's stepmother, Susan, on the other hand, has good intentions for her, but she expresses them unflatteringly, attributing her troubles to the fact that her mother is a lesbian. She and another character, Luke (Alex Sharp), contribute a lot of levity to the film; he with his typical antics, and Susan, notably with her giant cheeseburger shaped cake that says, "Eat it up, Ellen." Ellen's half-sister, Kelly (Liana Liberato), is the only one who does not seem to bother her. In fact, according to Dr. Beckham, she is the only one who does not have an entirely self-serving narrative around Ellen's condition. Her sole complaint is that she does not get to have a sister.

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Within the film, *Threshold* introduces Ellen's fellow patients, including one with a feeding tube, a girl with her barf stockpile beneath her bed, and a pregnant female with anorexia. Surprisingly, save for mealtime, the in-patient home is not a depressing environment. The patients even have an inside joke about calling the dining area the torture chamber. They have group therapy sessions once a week and earn points for chores. Except for Luke, a ballet performer whose illness is a result of his leg injury, their individual experiences are not explored in the film. He serves as a foil to Ellen. He is zesty, funny, and often silly, whereas Ellen is jaded and guarded. Their tale provides a sub-narrative to the film. There is what may vaguely be regarded as a romance between them. It may be the film's single flaw. Romance aside, Luke is a crucial character since he serves as the voice of wisdom for Ellen.

Dr. Beckham is an unconventional doctor. His methods of treating his patients include taking them to an artificial rain art installation and even making them read "Courage," one of Anne Sexton's famous poems. His personal narrative remains absent from the film except in a brief scene when he tells Ellen that he likes to focus on his work to the exclusion of all else. The film reaches a climax when the pregnant girl at *Threshold* loses her baby to purging. Ellen's little progress comes crashing down when she begins to doubt the therapy's efficacy, and she leaves *Threshold* for her mother's place at Phoenix. The last few scenes, in which she is meandering through her dreamscapes are significant in understanding the growth of her character and why she chooses to improve at long last.

To the Bone does not try to get to the root cause of Ellen's illness, though the viewer gets a handful of hints. The director's intention does not appear to be to solve the mystery, and the film is not a mystery. It is laudable for shedding light on how psychological issues like OCD interact with anorexia. Beyond a point, it is not so much about remaining thin as it is about the euphoria that comes from starving oneself. Several scenes peer into the mind of a person suffering from a disorder. The dimly lit and sepia tones in those shots create a haunting atmosphere reminiscent of an obsessive environment within one's mind. Without being didactic, the film raises awareness of a serious condition.

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.

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HMU Announces the 2022 Film Series

If falsehood, like truth, had only one face, we would be in better shape. For we would take as certain the opposite of what the liar said. But the reverse of truth has a hundred thousand shapes and a limitless field.

Montaigne, *Essays*, Of Liars

If you've told a lie and know it, it is likely you have some answer to the question **What is truth?** If you were mistaken about some matter and corrected the error, it is likely you had to answer the question **Is that true?**

But knowing what truth is and asking if something is true are profoundly different questions. The two are often confused. Truth is among the greatest of the Great Ideas. Truth will be the focus of the 2022 Harrison Middleton University film series.

The series includes Kurosawa's masterpiece, *Rashomon*; dystopian classic, *1984*, starring John Hurt and Richard Burton; and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. Our screenings and discussions will be guided by a synoptical look at Truth. We will read and discuss short provocative quotations from a wide variety of authors as a lens through which we examine the films and the important questions they raise. We will use Zoom to facilitate our discussions for this series. To register, please contact Rebecca Fisher at rfisher@hmu.edu. The film series is free and open to all, but limited to 15 participants. Once registered, additional information on the films, quotes, and Zoom will be provided.

Film Series Schedule



Discussions will be held on Thursday evenings:
5:00 pm PST/6:00 pm MST/7:00 pm CST/8:00 pm EST.

Thursday, January 13th - *1984*

Thursday, February 10th - *Rashomon*

Thursday, March 3rd - *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*

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Artistry and Freedom: A Review of J. Scott Lee's *Invention, The Art of Liberal Arts*

by Joseph Coulson

J. Scott Lee's *Invention, The Art of Liberal Arts* offers a wide-ranging discussion of liberal education past and present, along with well-reasoned conjectures about the future of liberal arts learning. The depth and breadth of the essays come as no surprise, given that Professor Lee holds a Ph.D. in the History of Culture from the University of Chicago, where he felt the influence of Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, not to mention Richard Mckeon, Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, and Clifton Fadiman. Late in the book, in "The Concept of Core Texts," Lee recounts the heady days when Great Books programs began to emerge in colleges across the country, and the Great Books Foundation, under the leadership of Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, began publishing core texts—the *Great Books of the Western World*—as a uniform set.

As a keen observer of the culture wars, Lee provides a corrective for those who believe that programs based on core texts are rigidly canonical or, in current practice, focused only on the contributions of white men from the West. Indeed, Lee argues for an interdisciplinary approach; specifically, core courses that give, for example, equal measure to The Bible, Plato, Confucius, and Cervantes, providing a model for the synthesis of world classics, including modern and contemporary works. In support of this approach, the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), co-founded by Lee and where he served for many years as Executive Director, offered a series of summer seminars where teams of faculty worked to "reinvigorate the use of liberal arts, ancient and modern" (123). As a result of these seminars, ACTC members, working to advance the idea of globalization in core text courses, travelled by invitation to the Caribbean Basin, Europe, Central Asia, and China to "honor an institution's specific cultural tradition, to relate the core texts of arts and sciences to liberal arts education, and most importantly to work reflexively and inductively from possible core texts to a position of how to read with students given texts from one's own or another tradition" (124). Clearly, ACTC's summer seminars and the visitations that followed, elaborated in papers Lee delivered in Colombia and China, exemplify a commitment to diversity and inclusion in classical studies and core text curricula, an effort not only consistent with liberal arts values but essential to the survival of liberal arts education.

Lee offers his readers, especially practitioners of the liberal arts, a wealth of useful information for addressing challenges, questions of efficacy, and curriculum development in liberal education, but at the heart of his book is a close examination of Aristotle's *Poetics* which, according to Lee, is the "The Ultimate Argument for the Liberal Arts" (227). Lee takes up differentiation in Aristotle, the practice of making careful and nuanced distinctions, particularly between Nature and Art. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle observes the intersection of human imagination and Nature, the moment of invention that creates

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something new, a creative act dependent on the unconstrained ability to imagine, which also stands as a powerful exercise of freedom. Aristotle's observations serve as Lee's starting point: "Real freedom is not obtained simply by studying invention; it has to be directed toward making it. Liberal arts education is, ultimately, concerned with the connection between "techne" and "poesis" – between artistry in its fullest sense and with production" (227). It follows, then, that the study of foundational works in the arts and sciences provides students with an opportunity to discover, through dialectic and application, the means for invention, for making something new. "This," according to Lee, "is the ultimate argument for the liberal arts. Invention in art, including the liberal arts, is not only an inevitable expression of our humanity; it is a maker of our freedom" (228).

Lee also considers some of the current defenses and appeals for liberal education and explains why most are ineffective, particularly those justifications that focus on moral purpose, political solutions, or the promotion of democracy. In Lee's view, arguments such as these, despite having degrees of merit, do not persuade those skeptical of the enterprise because the power of the liberal arts is found first in its process, in the means, not the intention of an end. It is the exercise of the liberal arts that creates the potential for invention and freedom, and the successful expressions of this exercise and potential deliver products of enduring value. In this way, the starting point is not the product; the starting point is, rather, the cultivation of the liberated mind and unfettered imagination. J. Scott Lee's *Invention, The Art of Liberal Arts* provides an interesting framework for developing liberal arts curricula and for demonstrating to students and critics the power of liberal education. If you're a practitioner – or, perhaps, a reader interested in the possible expressions of our humanity – then this book will be well worth your time and attention.

Highlights from The Willis Speight Harrison Athenaeum Online Library



Students no longer need to install a VPN to access the HMU Online library. You may access the Online Library straight from the HMU website (www.hmu.edu/online-library) using your unique login and password. Students can create a personal account within JSTOR. This will pair with HMU's account and allows the student to save their JSTOR research in a private folder. The free personal account also allows a user up to 100 free monthly article reads. HMU students can utilize their free monthly reads to access articles for resources that HMU isn't subscribed to. JSTOR also contains images. Conduct an image search from the drop-down menu. Check <https://www.hmu.edu/hmu-blog> for more upcoming JSTOR tool updates.