

# HMU: Dialogues

Harrison Middleton University

11/12/2014

Edition 1, Volume 2

## Letter from the Editor:

In reviewing the content for this newsletter, I noted the tremendous amount of activity from both students and staff. It is so exciting and refreshing to see the high level of scholarship from one's peers. Harrison Middleton University (HMU) truly is fostering conversations that make a difference. In addition, HMU embraces relationships that nurture a strong degree of intellectualism. Read more about another Great Books group, Great Discourses, that we have partnered with (on page 8-9). Also, HMU now offers film discussions that pair a text with a film version. View the upcoming film schedule on page 7 and register for one or all of the opportunities.

We hope these additions will enhance student life and we want you to be a part of it!

Those of us at HMU travel often and look forward to the faces we meet, the places we learn about and the literature we read. We discuss great works because they enhance our worldview. And we are truly grateful for the discussion of our peers who make the conversation better! Enjoy and all the best to you this holiday season.

As always, you can reach me at [asimon@hmu.edu](mailto:asimon@hmu.edu).

Thanks! *Alissa*

## Reviews and More:

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Thanks to HMU Tutor, Alissa Simon, for the following film review.

*Much Ado About Nothing*.  
Director, Joss Whedon. 2012.  
Film/DVD. Running time: 109 minutes.

From the very first scene, one realizes that this version of *Much Ado About Nothing* is going to be something new, different. Shakespeare left no stage directions, no discussion of uniform, costume or outfit. He specifies the background simply as "Messina". Nowhere in the play does it say to exit right, left or in tears. Instead, Shakespeare lets dialogue direct the actor. Therefore, the fast paced witty banter of *Much Ado About Nothing* guides most of the action. Jokes drip with sarcasm and sharp tongues abound. Purportedly a love story between Hero and Claudio, the stage is stolen by humor.

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## *Let's Celebrate:*

Harrison Middleton University congratulates graduates **Dr. Edgar Daniels** and **Dr. Philip Stewart** on their 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 academic achievement, character and leadership.

Please join HMU tutors and staff in congratulating **Dr. Phillip M. Perry** on successfully earning his Doctor of Arts in Humanities! For his applied project in partial fulfillment of his Doctor of Arts degree requirement, **Dr. Perry** submitted a novel dealing with art and writing. We wish **Dr. Perry** all the best in his future endeavors.

HMU tutors and staff also congratulate **Jennifer Colleen Pearce-Stokes** on successfully earning her Master of Arts in Humanities! In partial fulfillment of her Master of Arts in Humanities program requirement, she submitted a series of fairy tales titled "Plato's Tales." We wish her all the best in her future endeavors!

## *Presentation and Publication Highlights:*

~ **Dr. Ed Daniels**, HMU alum, presented at the New York State Middle School Association Regional Conference, Teaching for Tomorrow: Creatively Teaching the Common Core, held at St. Joseph's College on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The title of the presentation was *Enhancing Textual Analysis in the Common Core Using Synectics*.

~ **Michael J. Caba**, doctoral student, published a book review of *Homer: The Preclassic* by Gregory Nagy in the Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin, Volume 58. Brief Synopsis of Review: The Homeric question, namely, the identity of "Homer" and the process by which the epics ascribed to him (i.e., the Iliad and Odyssey) came to have their present form has occupied scholars in energetic discussion for a number of centuries. Along these lines, the book *Homer: The Preclassic* by Gregory Nagy is a new and important contribution to this long running dialogue. The text presents the author's views on the evolution of the Homeric works preceding the fifth century BC and are based upon his 2002 Sather Lectures at the University of California at Berkeley. In summary, the reviewer highly recommends the book for those interested in the Homeric epics, but suggests that the reader be ready for some heavy lifting.

~ **Dr. Philip Stewart**, HMU Tutor, recently published an essay titled, "Is Christ-Shaped Philosophy Really Philosophy?" The entire article is available on the Evangelical Philosophical Society's website at: <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=240&mode=detail>

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## Presentation and Publication Highlights (continued):

~ **Ellin Iselin**, HMU doctoral candidate and Professor of Humanities at Florida State College at Jacksonville, co-presented "How to Use DNA in Genealogy Research" to the Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society. A short summary and photo can be found at: <http://www.sgesjax.org/july-meeting-dna-in-research/>.

~ The newest book by **Dr. Deb Deacon**, HMU's Dean of Graduate Studies, arrived on June 18. Please join us in congratulating her for this new and important work: *War Imagery in Women's Textiles: An International Study of Weaving, Knitting, Sewing, Quilting, Rug Making and Other Fabric Arts*.

## Staff Highlights:



**Dr. Deb Deacon** presented at and attended a number of events this summer. Review this list of events below:

~ **June 6** – featured speaker at Phoenix COMICON; presentations – The World of Hayao Miyazaki; War and the Apocalypse in Anime and Manga

~ **July 11** – interviewed by CBS News London intern for an article on anime culture and women

~ **September 12** – New Directions: Examining the Past, Creating the Future, Textile Society of America Biennial Symposium, Los Angeles, CA; paper title: Stitches of War: Women's Commentaries on Conflict in Latin America

~ **October 3** – Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies conference, Arizona State University; Master Illusions: Differing Perspectives in Japanese Woodblock Prints – panel chair and discussant

**Alissa Simon** and **Dr. Margaret Metcalf**, HMU Tutors, attended Toronto Pursuits 2014.

**Gary Schoepfel**, HMU Tutor, led a discussion group on *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie at Toronto Pursuits 2014.

**Dr. Curd**, President, **Andy Tafoya**, HMU Tutor, and **Jessica Williams**, Operations Coordinator, attended the 2014 National Charter Schools Conference.

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## Staff Highlights (continued):



**Andy Tafoya**, HMU Tutor, attended the Pacific Northwest Great Books weekend event at the University of Puget Sound in June 2014.

On June 7-8, **Michael Maclean**, HMU Tutor, was a featured speaker at Phoenix COMICON. His presentations included: Syfy Creature Features; Bloody Good Horror Screenwriters Party; Kaiju Rising: Age of Monsters.

**Michael Curd**, Vice President, Director of Education, attended the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

**Rebecca Fisher**, HMU Tutor and Director of Continuing Education, attended the Pacific Northwest Great Books weekend event at the University of Puget Sound in June 2014.

~ **October 2014** – Attended the DETC (Distance Education and Training Council) October workshop in Austin, TX with **Lauren Guthrie**, HMU Registrar.



*ABOVE: HMU Tutor, Rebecca Fisher (left), reads from the text while attendee Melody Winkle listens. (Photo credit: Blake Manning)*

*LEFT: Michael Curd (far right) with colleagues at the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education.*

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## Reviews (continued):

And so, while this is a tale of love, it is also a tale of communication. To perform or direct this play can be a daunting enterprise for one main reason: it requires a clear understanding of the intended tension, wit and sarcasm between Beatrice and Benedick. Without this the play will not work onscreen. Yet, from beginning to end, Whedon's version of *Much Ado About Nothing* just works. There are three main aspects that help it function so nicely. First, Dogberry (Nathan Fillion) is spectacular. Second, the dialogue, interaction and tension between Benedick (Alexis Denisof) and Beatrice (Amy Acker) allows the viewer to laugh. And cringe. And third, the modern day setting adds another, appropriate layer of irony.

Shakespeare enjoyed a good line. He liked to play with double meanings and Dogberry falls into this tradition. He plays an ass, is labeled such and then demands that it be written into the narrative as evidence against a witness. Nathan Fillion delivers Dogberry's at times indecipherable lines with authority, ease and comedic timing necessary to pull off his pompous and ridiculous behavior. His delivery is, in a word, immaculate. Using phrases like "Be vigilant" and "vagrom men", Fillion proves that he understands the content and meaning of each line, which enables him to deliver them well. Fillion's short appearance in the play is a delight.

While Dogberry is the play's tantalizing side dish, Benedick and Beatrice comprise the heart of the play. The viewer is made aware of Benedick's reputation even before he arrives on stage through the biting sarcasm of Beatrice. While Claudio and the Prince hold Benedick in high regard, Beatrice alone takes a harsh tone towards him. When both enter the same scene, they attack each other and scorn each other vehemently. Acker's confidence allows her to play a convincing Beatrice. Clearly, Beatrice is intelligent and educated, yet still she inexplicably reverses her opinion of Benedick upon learning of his love for her. In the movie, Beatrice curls up and hides under the kitchen counter in an attempt to hear gossip regarding Benedick's love for her. She accidentally bumps into counters and walls a number of times, much in the vein of slapstick comedy. Likewise, Benedick becomes a ridiculous spectacle, rolling on the grass with a small tree branch for camouflage in attempt to hear of Beatrice's love for him. These scenes capitalize upon Shakespeare's language and translate it into action and expression for modern day audiences.

The physical backdrop of the film is, in actuality, Whedon's own house. Filmed in a few short weeks, Whedon chose the privacy of his Los Angeles estate as the setting. And as such the use of scenery and props is commensurate with the lifestyle of a modern audience. The set, at times, becomes absolutely, devastatingly funny.

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## Reviews (continued):

Whedon places props with such subtlety, that at first glance, they may be missed. For example, the Prince is a most important visitor, and Benedick a soldier of high repute, yet Leonato houses them in children's bedrooms. At the beginning of Benedick's infatuation with Beatrice, he lays on a twin bed adoring Beatrice's image with a ladder of Beanie Babies beside him. Whedon places these all-but mundane characters into a mundane lifestyle. The camera angles take advantage of space both stylish and sparse, making shadows when appropriate and light when suitable.

Not only a romantic comedy, Whedon's version of *Much Ado About Nothing* fits into tradition of the screwball comedies of the 1930s and 40s. These romantic comedies, filmed in black and white, often traced the turns of a ridiculous and inexplicable love affair (as in the case of Benedick and Beatrice). The most prominent female often dominated the leading man, which is true of Shakespeare's play. While Beatrice loses much of her grace in comparison to

Benedick's athleticism, she remains emotionally dominant. And finally, the dialogue is fast-paced and witty, much in the same way that Shakespeare wrote the play and the way that the actors deliver it. The only question is, why has this not been done before? Black and white certainly fits the black tie affair idea of a wedding. It also suits the focus on language. In a play where nothing is as it seems, meaning can be found through the simple use of images in shadows and light.

I have enjoyed Shakespeare from the moment that I first read *Romeo and Juliet* (way back in high school). Since then, I have actively searched for productions of all of Shakespeare's plays. I enjoy his language, style, wit, minimalism and emotion. However, I have to admit that *Much Ado About Nothing* had not garnered much of my attention until I viewed this version. It now rests among my favorites for love of the characters that Whedon brought to life.

- Alissa Simon, HMU Tutor

Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman, for I cannot see how sleeping should offend. ~ Dogberry

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## Continuing Education:

### HMU's Newest Continuing Ed Option Includes Film:

The screen reads "The End." As house lights come up, the two in front of me have now decided to **stop** talking. Like a used sucker stuck to a formica table top the soles of my shoes must be peeled from the sloping floor. The popcorn has yet to drop off my lap, and I'm barely thirty nine steps out the movie theater's exit before I hear that exasperating question: Well, what did ya think?

Trying? You bet! But even more bothersome is leaving the cinema having experienced a great flick and having no one to talk to. I'm writing to let you know you are not alone. Help is on its way.

There have been many happy marriages between great books and great films. Harrison Middleton University's 2014 - 2015 film series now provides a convenient forum to explore several literary and film masterworks.

Once each month, participants gather on a two-hour conference call to discuss a book and its movie adaptation. Discussions are held on Thursday evenings at 5:00 pm PT/6:00 pm MT/7:00 pm CT/8:00 pm ET.

In October, we discussed Shakespeare's play, *Othello*, and the film starring Kenneth Branagh as Iago.

We hope that you will take advantage of the remaining six opportunities to join us. You may participant in one or all the sessions from the comfort of your home.

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## Film Discussion Schedule:



**December 11**, *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles

**January 8**, *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

**February 12**, Abraham Lincoln's speeches and the film *Lincoln*

**March 12**, *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells

**April 9**, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

**May 14**, *1984* by George Orwell

**For additional information about registration, please contact Rebecca Fisher at [rfisher@hmu.edu](mailto:rfisher@hmu.edu).**

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## Continuing Education (continued):

Let me draw your attention to the December 11 session, *Oedipus the King*, with a link to my earlier blog [<http://hmu.edu/blog/2014/5/30/film-review-oedipus-rex.html>]. This is a rare opportunity to see how this ancient Greek dramatic masterpiece has been adapted and directed by Julie Taymor of *Lion King* fame. Also, the last three discussions are scheduled in response to requests for classic Sci-Fi movie adaptations.

This is your opportunity to read a great book, screen a great film, and thoughtfully discuss both. No sticky soles, no annoying patrons! Join us for a satisfying evening of insightful talk and fair bit of fun.

~ Gary Schoepfel, HMU Tutor

## Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> Brings More Great Books Discussion Courses Online

*Harrison Middleton University is happy to recommend our partner Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> to our students and graduates seeking continued engagement in discussions of great books. HMU offers Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> discussion courses.*

Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> uses online video conferencing technology to make high quality Great Books discussion courses available to students around the world. Their live, interactive, small-group discussion courses are designed and led by a highly experienced faculty drawn from Great Books programs across North America.

Multi-week courses on a wide range of topics begin in mid-November 2014 and again in January and March 2015. Course topics run the gamut from the ancient to the modern and the sacred to the secular, and often combine texts in unusual ways in order to highlight each work's unique characteristics. All courses are taught by professional instructors devoted to the close reading and careful analysis of the texts being studied; to the cultivation of students' critical thinking, critical empathy and collaboration skills; and to the facilitation of individualized and collective "Aha!" moments of discovery.

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## Student Corner

~ **George Narvaez** was invited to Shimer College in April. He met students, staff and professors and even participated in a couple of classes during his campus tour. Read more about George's excellent visit to a bricks and mortar college that also focuses on the Great Books and Shared Inquiry on HMU's blog: <http://hmu.edu/blog/2014/11/7/student-post-shimerian-for-a-day.html>

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## Continuing Education (continued):

Free introductory classes and special discussions are being held in November and December for prospective students who want to sample the online classroom and meet the faculty. And, Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> is offering all Harrison Middleton University students and graduates a special 25% tuition discount on November, January and March courses. Simply join their mailing list by November 28 using the form on the [Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> homepage](#) and mention "HMU" to receive a discount code. (Please note that these courses are not offered for credit toward a degree program.)

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The energy  
of the mind  
is the  
essence of  
life.  
~ Aristotle

*For more information, visit the Great Discourses<sup>SM</sup> website or  
Facebook page:*

[www.GreatDiscourses.com](http://www.GreatDiscourses.com)  
[www.Facebook.com/GreatDiscourses](http://www.Facebook.com/GreatDiscourses)



## Meet the Tutors:

Please welcome **Dr. Philip Stewart**, HMU's newest tutor. **Dr. Stewart** is a native Floridian, recently returned to his hometown. Prior to becoming a tutor at Harrison Middleton University, he was a Lecturer in Fundamental Theology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München in Germany. He holds an MA and DA in Philosophy and Religion from Harrison Middleton University and a D.theol. from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. His current research interests include the historical development of natural theology, the application of virtue ethics in a Christian context, and the relationship between theology and philosophy.

In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you. ~ Mortimer J. Adler