

**From the Faculty and Staff of the Department of English**  
13 June 2020

To participate in and to witness the cruelty, resistance, protest, and love that have swept across the United States and the world in recent days is to experience the extremes of human emotion. The pain and anger expressed are raw, elemental, and righteous. In solidarity, the University of Rhode Island Department of English reaffirms its longstanding commitment that BIPOC voices be strong and permanent presences in our faculty, staff, student body, curriculum, teaching, research, and community. We welcome dialogue with anyone who sees this message as we work to support social justice and antiracism in everything we do. We affirm that Black Lives Matter. We mourn the loss of Black life at the hands of an entrenched and systemic bigotry.

Literary study and the work of the poet, like all the humanities and arts, have been brutalized by the administrative class for over a decade. In this context, jibes of “mere fiction” or “despite its origin in fiction” are but pinpricks, delivered by a misunderstanding of what “fiction” truly means. Any competent philologist will tell us that “fiction” originates in the actions of forming, creating, making, and doing. To create fiction is to imagine and create the world. Fiction potently speaks the experience of individuals and cultures across the centuries. Fiction has the awesome power to give witness to injustice and to repair it. *A Different Drummer*, William Melvin Kelley’s astonishing and harrowing alternate history of the American South and the poisonous legacy of slavery, depends on fiction as the source of its reparative power—“Can’t a story be good without some lies.”

“There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow,” says Hamlet as he agrees to the duel that will end his life. “If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.” Hamlet knows he is going to die, somehow, but he finds solace in a God who concerns Himself with even the most minute of events. Whether or not we share Hamlet’s faith, we can share his implicit feeling of hope (a Rhode Island specialty), in the sense that there is still work to do. It is a sense of purpose, compassion, and solidarity that James Baldwin found in his reckoning with Hamlet’s creator: “The greatest poet in the English language found his poetry where poetry is found: in the lives of people. He could have done this only through love—by knowing, which is not the same thing as understanding, that whatever was happening to anyone was happening to him.” This is an inspiring time to be alive, a time when we can see with utmost clarity the goals we must reach, and feel more than ever before that we have the power to reach them.

The Department of English will continue its celebration of fiction and its power to remake the world, and affirms that we will be a haven of welcome, safety, celebration, and activism for all the experiences we embody. Please join us in the pursuit.

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