April 2009

Faculty View

A Publication of the ECC Faculty Association
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Faculty Spotlight: Samuel Lumbsden

by Eileen DeFreece

With the recent integration of the Bilingual Studies Department into the college's Humanities Division comes a wonderful new energy, including an undeniable presence among the division's full-time faculty.

Difficult to miss, the 6' 4" Samuel L. Lumbsden, who joined ECC's Bilingual Studies faculty in September 2007, proves to be a meaningful addition to the college community.

Lumbsden brings a multitude of credentials, experience, intellect, skills, and talents to the college, which benefits our students in so many ways. Quiet, stoic and distinguished in appearance, the native Panamanian recently shared his personal Mission statement pledging "to teach students of different cultures… from all walks of life reading, writing, and English skills, and to share real-life experiences and challenges." Obviously, Lumbsden is accomplishing his goal.

"I like the fact that I'm able to empower students as they learn to read and write [in English], and especially when they see

me around the school and thank me personally for helping them," he commented, adding that seeing the changes in the students as they mature and become enlightened is very satisfying.

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Stranger than Fiction: What Have We Failed to Learn from History and the Movies?

by Mike Pekarofski

A packed multiplex on a Saturday afternoon in late December, and I have nearly one hundred and eighty minutes invested in *Frost/Nixon*. The entire movie is about to come down to one crucial exchange between the now infamous talk show host, portrayed by Michael Sheen, and the even more infamous former president, played by Frank Langella. Frost has Nixon pinned into a corner on Watergate. As the taping is stopped, the disgraced former leader contemplates ending the interview altogether.

The drama builds even further as Nixon returns to his seat. Once again, Frost repeats the question, one which would either force Nixon into the most widely publicized confession in television history or the wiliest of evasions. The camera zooms in for a close-up of Langella's weathered face, taut with anticipation and wet with beads of nervous perspiration. Just as his lips start to form a response, the audio cuts out and an ear-piercing shrill breaks through the theater's state-of-the art sound system. Langella's lips continue to move on screen, but no one in the theater can hear his response.

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Book Reviews by Jeff Lee

Marilyne Robinson's *Housekeeping*

Mountains in fog still have the look of mountains, but the specifics on the surface are obscured. Also, like a person standing in a thick fog, the farther we look from our vantage point, the fainter the specifics seem, until everything merges to grey in the distance. These images are good analogies for Marilynne Robinson's "Housekeeping." In this short, but rich story of a house and the people of different generations who lived in it, time and place are often approximations at best.

The story is told in the first person by Ruth. Through most of the book she reflects in a memoir-like style upon how she came to her grandmother's house as a young girl and left it as a teenager. We never know Ruth's exact age or exactly where the house is. We know Ruth's last name, but it seems irrelevant to her story. We know the house is in the town of Fingerbone, but apart from being on a railroad line hard by a glacial lake somewhere between Butte and Spokane, we know nothing else. Likewise, the story takes place sometime between the end of World War II and the space race; specific years are never given. In a way this helps to keep the reader focused on the characters in the house and their relations with each other. In Ruth's time in the house, she and her sister Lucille are raised, in succession, by their grandmother, their grandfather's sisters and their Aunt Sylvie. The writing around these characters is rich and image-driven, with all of the senses engaged through Robinson's writing.

When the action takes place away from the house, the writing is not as detailed (though these events do add to the story) as if, through Ruth's eyes, the world becomes fuzzier the farther you move from the house.

At around 218 pages, this book could be finished in a few hours, just right for a long weekend or a plane trip. The story moves at a leisurely but continuous pace, like the river described in the book. And the absence of exact time and place references keep you focused on the action for any clues that can orient your senses. All in all, a good read.

Brick Lane by Monica Ali

The concept of Fate is a key concept in much of the world's great literature. From *The Aeneid* to *Huck Finn* and beyond, how characters can, can't or don't affect the goings on around them is a recurring theme. In Monica Ali's 2003 work *Brick Lane*, the concept of Fate is woven throughout.

The story focuses on Nazneen, a child bride who leaves her village in Bangladesh in the late 1980s to go to London for an arranged marriage to a man a number of years older than her. We see Nazneen, and how she sees both herself and those around her, in two time periods: the late 80s when she is first married and about 15 years later, after her children have been born. Letters to Nanzeen from her sister Hasina, back home in Bangladesh, do an excellent job of filling the years and advancing the story.
The most interesting thing I noticed in reading "Brick Lane" was how often I was reminded of other books. The social commentary of Dickens came to mind as I read of Nanzeen walking through the immigrant alleys and tenements where she lives. The relationship between Nanzeen and Hasina called to mind Nettie and Celie from *The Color Purple*. Chanu, Nanzeen's husband, is cut from the same cloth as *Death of a Salesman*'s Willy Loman, a man in a world with little need of his talents. The subtle sexual tensions that arise midway through the book bring to mind the works of Gabriel Garcia-Marquez. And throughout the story, all of the characters – major, minor and momentary – are battling with their fates and the age-old question of whether we can control our destinies – and what happens when we try. Four hundred pages have rarely been so rich and so enjoyable.

If you're not a big reader, a movie version of *Brick Lane* came out in 2008 and you could use this as a "Cliff Notes" way of learning the story. But I highly recommend reading the novel to get the full impact of Ali's classical writing style and character treatment. Either way, as the midwife Banesa says early in the book, setting the tone for what is to come: "Fate will decide everything in the end, whatever route you take."

Faculty Spotlight: (*cont.)*

Early in his career at ECC, Lumbsden served as Coordinator of the Bilingual Studies Department, a very important job in terms of student success in the program. He remarked, "Making sure placement tests are read and returned to the students in a timely manner is crucial; however, getting the adjuncts to see its importance is a challenge."

Lumbsden's dedication to his job has truly earned him the respect of his colleagues, as is evidenced by John Hills who recalled other projects that he and Lumbsden worked on together. "He's a hard working guy with the best interests of the students in mind," Hills said.

Lumbsden, who began his ECC career as an adjunct, teaches ESL courses as well as developmental English and college composition. He has earned two Bachelor's degrees: one in Foreign Language and Literature, and the other in English and Education, both from the University of Panama, Central America. After relocating to the United States, he earned his Master of Arts in Urban Education with an English as a Second

Language concentration from New Jersey City University. But apparently, Lumbsden is far from being finished with his educational aspirations. In fact, he plans to complete a second master's in educational technology. However, his ultimate goal is to acquire a doctoral degree in education from Seton Hall University in Education.

Before joining the faculty at ECC, Lumbsden had been a familiar face on the Hudson County Community College campus for over eighteen years where he worked as an administrator by day for the Continuing Education department, and taught as an adjunct professor at night. Lumbsden also served as Director of Program Operations at HCCC. However, Lumbsden says that he always knew that his first love was in the classroom.

At ECC, besides teaching and other departmental duties, Lumbsden has been busy contributing to the college in other ways: he serves on the Academic Advisory Council where he is instrumental on two sub-committees, including the College Success Seminar Task Force and Advisory & Registration.

In addition, the multi-lingual Lumbsden has incorporated "Reading Initiatives" in his classes to get students to read in English for ten to fifteen minutes during class, followed by a Q & A exercise. He also requires that his students habitually read the local newspapers.

"This gets them into the habit of understanding the slogan, 'the more you read, the more you see,' " he said, pointing out that as one reads, the mind's eye takes a picture of sentence structure and grammar, which later enables one to express his or her ideas when writing or speaking.

Besides teaching, Lumbsden enjoys reading, participating in walkathons, cycling in local competitions, and most of all singing. Currently, he sings bass in his church choir, and he has joined ECC's College Choir. One of nine children growing up in Panama City, Lumbsden developed a love for singing at an early age and joined a variety of quartets, sextets, and even choirs in his native country.

No one can deny that ECC is very fortunate to have such a gifted and talented professor who is revered by both students and faculty.

Stranger than Fiction (continued)

"In the end, Doubt *forces us to ponder whether the truth is more valuable than the process by which we arrive at it."*

As people made the obvious jokes about missing minutes of tape and wondered if Tricky Dick's power and penchant for cover-ups may somehow have reached beyond the grave, another Dick and some even scarier parallels came to mind. I thought about my own naiveté, not too long ago, when I thought the country had really learned some lasting lessons from the Nixon era, ones having to do with ideological wars abroad and the dangers of a president abusing power. "Those who do not know their history," the adage teaches, "are bound to repeat it."

While this saying is normally invoked when constructing broad analogies between various historical periods, there really is *no* analogy here. After all, Watergate and the entire Nixon presidency was merely a dress rehearsal for Cheney and Rumsfeld – significant role players in the Nixon Whitehouse and future stars in the Bush Administration. They would learn a valuable lesson from this "disgraceful" episode: Nixon's mistake – as they seemed to think - was not that he went too far in abusing the power of the Oval Office, but that he simply did not go far enough. Hotel break-ins now seem tame compared with Abu Ghraib.

Was I the only one ruminating on this? Or was everyone too busy thinking about free movie passes to worry about *Rumsfeld and Cheney, Act III?*

Well, we did get passes, and a second trip to the multiplex would transport me back to another important era of American history and culture in the screen adaptation of John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt*. Since it is set in the midst of the Cold War and less than ten years after the last McCarthy hearings, I could not help but think of Arthur Miller's the *Crucible*. I wondered whether Shanley was suggesting some parallels between McCarthyism and our own post 911 paranoia, in much the same way Miller had used the Salem witch trials in order to examine the hysteria so much a part of the House Un-American Activities Committee. But, as any good piece of literature does, *Doubt* leaves us with more questions than answers, and the answers that we get are deeply disturbing, at best.

While we wait for that moment of vindication when measured objectivity and hard evidence triumph over rash subjectivity and blatant speculation, we are sadly disappointed. In the end, justice is not served by anyone, and the truth is ignored by nearly everyone. But, are we outraged that a heinous crime is covered up, or because the film seems to vindicate a character who is bent on destroying someone's reputation and career on the basis of a hunch rather than proof? Or, are we more disturbed by the abuse of authority, that of a morally bankrupt priest, the controlling and suspicious school principal, and the blind hierarchy of the Catholic Church who condone such immorality? In the end, *Doubt* forces us to ponder whether the truth is more valuable than the process by which we arrive at it.

Before a presidential order to close Guantanamo would be issued in January 2009, thus beginning to put the ugliness of the past eight years behind us, and before the first African-American would take the oath of office, another dubious block buster would transport me back to the present day and the bleak reality of postindustrial Detroit, ground zero of America's economic and cultural meltdown.

Clint Eastwood's *Grand Torino* tackles the issues of urban violence and racial tension in a way that is reminiscent of the Academy Award winning *Crash*. But unlike *Crash*, which featured multiple story-lines, a mesmerizing parade of characters, and multiple perspectives on race and class in contemporary America, Eastwood's film is centered around a sexist and xenophobic character who becomes its most dominant voice and its unlikely hero. In fact, this gun-toting, disgruntled and dysfunctional father becomes a role model for a young immigrant teen struggling to find himself. Instead of rejecting or even questioning Walt Kowalski's misanthropic *machismo* and distorted values, the film tragically upholds them.

Perhaps, *Grand Torino* merely reminds us, as the latest HBO documentary by Alexandra Pelosi does, that the Right has not gone away. Like Cheney and the boys, they wait in the wings, guns in one hand and copies of the *New York Post* in the other. The question remains: will America be smart enough to remember the lessons of the recent, and not so recent, past?

A Note of Thanks:
I wanted to take a moment to thank all those who purchased a copy of my CD *78*. Since John Hills and Milena Rubinstein have done most of the "hard selling," I am not quite aware of everyone who purchased a copy. So, if I have not thanked you personally, please accept my (our) sincere gratitude. You will be happy to note that we have raised close to $600 for student scholarships.

Jeff Lee has some more copies for sale. If any one is still interested in purchasing a CD, please contact Jeff.

Many have also shared some nice comments about my music, and I can not tell you how much that means. Thanks for supporting my art and ECC students!

Sincerely,
Mike Pekarofski (AKA Mike Pek)