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Modern Languages Messenger

NEWSLETTER OF THE MODERN LANGUAGES & LITERATURES DEPARTMENT

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The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language. *Ezra Pound* SPRING 2010

From Simmons to Paris

By **Melissa Poehnert**

When Simmons alumna Jennifer Larsen '06 began her college experience, she was determined to become fluent in French by the time she graduated. She explains, "I came to Simmons because it has a French major." Her coursework with Professor Eduardo Febles, Associate Professor of French at Simmons, started her on a journey that has led her to achieve her dream of becoming bilingual and bicultural.

Currently, Larsen is the Cultural Program Coordinator at the American University in Paris. She asserts, "I wouldn't have gotten my job if I wasn't bilingual." Her willingness to learn a new language and transcend culture also led her to meet the love of her life, a French man, with whom she is now "PACSeD." PACS stands for "pacte civil de solidarité," which



Professor Eduardo Febles with Jennifer Larsen'06

translates into "civil pact of solidarity." In 1999 the French government approved it as an alternative to marriage. Larsen explains, "It's what people in the U.S. understand as a civil union."

Reflecting on her interest in the French language, Larsen recalls, "From a very young age, I always had this drive to learn French." She credits her mother with introducing her to the language as a child by making

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Film Screening

The Spanish Liaison is hosting a screening of the documentary, *Our Disappeared/Nuestros Desaparecidos* on Wednesday, March 24 from 3:00-6:00 p.m. in MCB C101. Filmmaker Juan Mandelbaum will lead a discussion following the screening.

The film documents his personal search for the souls of friends and loved ones who were caught in the violence of the military and "disappeared" in Argentina during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. The film is in Spanish with English subtitles.

For more information, contact Alanna Echlin at alanna.echlin@simmons.edu.

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The Modern Languages Messenger is published once each semester to provide the Modern Languages & Literatures community at Simmons with departmental updates and cultural opportunities. *Editors: Melissa Poehnert, administrative assistant; Antigone Smith and Rama Srinivasan, student office assistants.*

Professor Lola Peláez to Publish New Book



Dolores Peláez Benítez, Associate Professor of Spanish, is on sabbatical during the 2009-10 academic year to complete a critical edition

of the first Castilian translation (1555-56) of Greek philosopher Epictetus' manuscript, *Encheiridion*, composed by the Spanish humanist Álvaro Gómez de Castro (1515-1580). Professor Peláez is pleased to offer a preview of her work.

In case you are not familiar with Epictetus, he was a Greek philosopher and a leading figure of Stoicism who lived in Rome ca 55-135. Along with stoic philosophers Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, he believed that virtue is sufficient for happiness, and destructive emotions are a result of errors in judgment. Epictetus was a professional teacher of philosophy whose didactic teachings have survived because his pupil

Arrian recorded them in *Diatribai* and *Encheiridion*, which are student journal writings.

During the Renaissance, interest in Epictetus was revived as part of the Neoestoic movement, and he became one of the most widely read ancient philosophers. In 1479, Florence-based humanist, Angelo Politian, translated the *Encheiridion* into Latin.

In the 16th century, Epictetus became the subject of interest among university scholars in Spain, such as Juan de Vergara, Hernán Núñez de Guzmán el Pinciano, and Álvaro Gómez de Castro, a Professor of Greek at the Universidad Complutense, Alcalá de Henares who became the first translator of Epictetus in Castilian.

Professor Peláez is working on Gómez de Castro's unedited translation of *Encheiridion* located in the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) in Madrid to produce a critical edition with an introductory study.

It will include commentary on Spain's sociological and cultural environment at the time of the transla-

tion and a comparative philological study between this first translation and the others by scholars Sánchez de las Brozas (1612), Gonzalo Correas (1630), and Francisco de Quevedo (1635).

Professor Peláez Benítez has taught at Simmons since 1992. She earned her doctorate in Hispanic Philology from the Universidad Complutense (Madrid, Spain). She has published numerous articles as well as the book, *El libro de la Historia Troyana de Pedro de Chinchilla: Estudio y Edición*, an anti-homeric medieval version of the legend of the Trojan War.

At Simmons, she has taught courses including "War, Love and Parody in Medieval and Contemporary Spanish Fiction," "The Image of the Bourgeoisie in the 19th and 20th Century Spanish Novel," "Spain Today: The Making of Spain: Studies in Spanish Culture," and "Spanish Culture as seen through Film."

Short-Term Summer Courses in Granada, Spain

Professor Amalia Pulgarín, Director of the Granada Institute of International Studies (GRIIS), will be visiting Simmons on Monday, March 22 and Thursday, March 25 to promote three exciting short-term courses in Granada, Spain this summer!

SPAN 201M Intermediate Spanish I

SPAN 240M Spoken Spanish

SPAN 253 Social and Political Issues in Modern Spain

The short-term summer courses, which run from May 22 through June 19, 2010, are especially designed for

Simmons students who receive credit for their coursework upon earning a passing grade. During the four-week program, students receive intensive training in the Spanish language and history. They are completely immersed in the local culture through their experiences living with local host families and participating in educational and leisurely excursions. The Andalusian city of Granada in the South of Spain is a major tourist attraction with a rich history.

For more information about GRIIS, attend the information session with Dr. Pulgarín on **Monday, March 22 at 4:00 p.m. in C105.**

From Simmons to Paris

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a fun game out of learning French words. Her mother studied it in high school but did not have the opportunity to attend college. She was committed to helping her daughter gain access to higher education where she could master French.

Following the advice of her high school French teacher who told her that the best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself in the culture, Larsen made plans to study abroad her junior year at the Sorbonne through the Sweet

Briar College in Paris program. She smiles nostalgically as she recalls her first semester in France,

“Everybody says this, but it really was a life-changing experience.”

When she returned to Simmons in spring 2005, she impressed Professor Febles with her ability to speak French. He encouraged Larsen to apply to a program sponsored by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) and the French government which places native English speakers with knowledge of French in public schools across France to help children learn English. She was accepted as a language assistant in the tiny, coastal town of Fécamp in the Northwestern province of Normandy.

Larsen pointed out, “People from all over the world participate in the program, including many who couldn’t afford to study abroad in school.” In contrast to her experience in Paris

where she was surrounded by other American students, life in Fécamp provided her the opportunity to immerse herself in the “everyday” life of the people there. She lived in a staff apartment on the grounds of the high school where she taught 12 hours per week. She also took lots of photos, many of which she posted on Flickr.

Larsen glows as she explains, “I was able to stay in France because I fell in love,” and then relates the story of how she met her partner. Serendipitously, he

happened to discover her Flickr postings. Though he was working 100 miles away in Paris, he emailed to ask what in the

world had brought her to his sleepy hometown. It turned out that his father taught at the local school where she worked. She got to know the rest of his family, and then she met him, and in 2007 they got “PACSeD.”

Recognizing the challenges of her new French-American identity, Larsen reveals, “You lose a certain comfort when you become bicultural.” For example, she finds herself forgetting words in English, though perhaps most significant is the reality that living in another culture changes how one fits into one’s native culture. This can be unsettling, but Larsen is confident that the benefits of opening herself to the French language and culture have been extremely worthwhile.

“The best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself in the culture.”

Alumna Encourages Students to Major in Education and Language

By Rama Srinivasan

Andrea Tomlinson ’91 never thought her love for the Spanish language and her career choice in elementary education could be merged. When she graduated from Simmons, she assumed that the teaching of Spanish was relegated to middle and high school because that is when she started to study Spanish. Consequently, as a elementary-classroom teacher, she did not envision creating an environment in which she could teach Spanish to her students. Now she knows better, and she is keen on encouraging Simmons students to take advantage of the opportunity to do a dual concentration in a foreign language and education.

Tomlinson believes that teaching young children a language is an exciting experience since they are so open to learning and absorb languages more easily at that age. She finds that working with little ones offers many opportunities to be creative while teaching. “I love reading books, singing, dressing up, and playing games with my students. It makes foreign language learning more contextual and fun!”

Tomlinson’s commitment to teaching language in her classroom is not only personally rewarding; she views it as a social necessity. “Ten years ago, 25 percent of elementary schools offered foreign language study; however, today that figure is down to 15 percent. Our country needs to realize the value of early foreign language instruction in our ever increasingly bilingual population of the U.S.” Through her love of Spanish, Tomlinson aims to teach her students “an appreciation for Spanish-speaking cultures and a broader view of their world.”

Almodóvar's *Los Abrazos Rotos*: a Must for Fans, Entertaining for All

By Rama Srinivasan and Melissa Poehnert

Watching a Pedro Almodóvar movie is always an emotional journey. The story may be summarized in a few sentences, sometimes not even that many, but the experience lingers long after you have stepped out of the theater. His latest film, *Los abrazos rotos* (Broken Embraces), is strictly for Almodóvar regulars, if not diehard fans. Though it lacks the universal appeal of previous films, it does prove entertaining. Like several of his earlier movies, it is a window he opens to his world – an account of how movies come into being.

In *Los abrazos rotos*, Almodóvar stays true to his melodramatic style and shows his audience many famil-

iar faces. He creates a film within a film by placing his classic film, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown), which many readers may recognize from SPAN 201, as the hilarious centerpiece to reflect on the circumstances behind a film's production. The meta-plot revolves around the fascinations of a director (Mateo) with his alter-ego (Harry Caine) played by Lluís Homar; the precarious position of the enchanting protagonist, Lena, played by Penelope Cruz; and the desperate actions of her aged, wealthy lover, Ernesto (José Luis Gómez.)

While making a film, Mateo and Lena have a short, tumultuous affair. They are exposed to the obsessive Ernesto through a series of amateur videos made by his teen-

age son who is documenting the film-making process. The relationship comes to a tragic end when an accident results in Mateo losing his eyesight and renouncing his off-screen identity.

Broken Embraces interweaves Almodóvar's signature themes of changing identities, illicit desire, suppressed homosexuality, and the human propensity for violence. He reveals them through momentary experiences rather than providing any substantive plotline. On his way he takes the opportunity to poke fun at Hollywood by referencing among others, the current *Twilight* craze. All in all, *Broken Embraces* offers an entertaining and ironic look at filmmaking and the complex play of emotions that goes with the process.

International Films Playing at Kendall Theatre in Cambridge

Mid-August Lunch (Italian)

Director: Gianni Di Gregorio

Gianni Di Gregorio stars in his directorial debut film about good food, feisty ladies and unlikely friendships during a very Roman holiday. Broke but armed with a wry sense of humor, middle-aged Gianni resides with his 93-year-old mother in their ancient apartment. The condo debts are mounting, but if Gianni looks after the building manager's mother during the Pranzo di Ferragosto (Italy's biggest summer holiday, and the Feast of the Assumption), all will be forgiven. But the manager shows up with an auntie, and a doctor friend appears with his mother in tow. The story is about how Gianni keeps the lively bunch well-fed and happy in his cramped quarters. The film has won numerous prizes at international festivals.

Ajami (Arab/Hebrew)

Director: Scandar Copti, Yaron Shani

An Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign Language Film, *Ajami* is a brave, apolitical look at

Jews and Arabs in Jaffa's multi-ethnic Ajami neighborhood. Debutant Israeli and Palestinian co-directors Scandar Copti and Yaron Shani use non-professional local actors to lend authenticity to a complex, cross-cultural drama. The film follows the lives of two brothers – a young Palestinian refugee working illegally to cover his mother's medical expenses, and a Jewish cop obsessed with finding his missing brother.

A Prophet (French)

Director: Jacques Audiard

Nineteen-year-old Malik El Djebena (Tahar Rahim), part Arab, part Corsican illiterate man has been condemned to six years in prison. Cornered by the leader of the Corsican gang who rules the prison, he is given a number of "missions" to carry out, in the process toughening him up and gaining the gang leader's confidence in the process. But Malik is a brave and bright student who dares to secretly develop his own plans.

International Study and Work Opportunities for Language Students

Comprehensive Website for Study Abroad Funding

The Institute of International Education offers an online directory of study abroad programs around the world. It is a valuable resource, which allows students to search by country or subject to find study abroad funding information including scholarships, fellowships, and grants.

Check it out at: <http://www.studyabroadfunding.org/>

Boren Awards

Are you interested in learning Arabic, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, advanced Spanish, or advanced French while studying abroad? Are you interested in working in a federal government position with national security responsibilities after graduation? Are you interested in receiving a scholarship towards your trip?

Boren Awards offers scholarships up to \$10,000 per semester and \$20,000 per year and fellowships up to \$12,000 per semester and \$24,000 per year.

For more information, go to www.borenawards.org.

Pescosolido Scholarship Foundation to Study Italian

The Pescosolido Family Scholarship Foundation has been awarding scholarships to students seeking education at accredited institutions in Italy for last 15 years.

Minimum scholarship award: \$1,000

Application requirements:

- Official school transcripts
- Two letters of recommendation
- Essay

Deadline to apply: May 15, 2010

Eligibility: Residents or domiciles of Massachusetts, attending or have attended schools, universities or colleges in the state.

For more information, email Lino Rullo at rullol@hotmail.com or call (781) 862-1633.

Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program

The Gilman Scholarship Program offers undergraduate students the opportunity to compete for funding to study worldwide, excluding Cuba and countries on the

U.S. Department of State's current Travel Warning list.

Who is eligible?

- Federal Pell Grant recipients

What does the application process include?

- Online student section
- Online study abroad advisor certification
- Financial aid advisor certification
- Three paper copies of the student transcript(s).

What are the summer and fall 2010 deadlines to apply?

- Online application: Tuesday, April 6, 2010
- Transcript postmark deadline: Fri., April 9, 2010
- Study abroad advisor certification: Tues., April 13 2010.

What is the maximum award?

- \$8,000

Access online application at <https://gilmanapplication.iie.org/IIE/public/Default.aspx>.

Language Assistantships in Spain

The Spanish Embassy's Education Office is seeking native English speakers to become language and culture assistants and share their knowledge of the English language and American culture with Spanish students and teachers while learning about Spanish culture and society.

Details:

- Deadline to apply: March 30, 2010
- Program duration: Mid-September and runs through mid-June.
- Minimum monthly allowance: €700 (USD \$1,025)
- Full medical insurance
- 12-16 hours weekly schedule working under the guidance of a classroom teacher

Requirements:

- Hold a U.S. or Canadian passport
- Be a native English speaker
- Be a junior or senior in college or have completed an undergraduate or graduate degree
- Have an intermediate/advanced level of Spanish

For more information and to apply, go to: www.educacion.es/exterior/usa