

ON THE ROAD

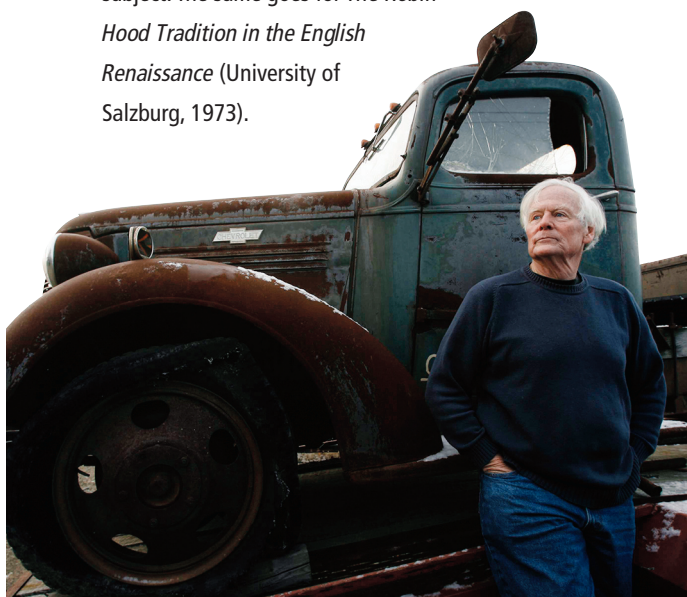
by Denise DiFulco

When you think of America's great interstates, Route 20 isn't usually one of the first to come to mind. But like the country's more recognizable routes, the east-west highway has a story to tell.

The historical events that occurred along the approximately 3,300-mile stretch from Boston to Newport, Ore., so fascinated Malcolm "Mac" Nelson '55 that he filled an entire book with them. *Twenty West: The Great Road Across America* is slated to be published this spring by SUNY Press.

"I hadn't thought about doing a book on the road until I realized there were so many interesting things along this highway," says the 51-year teaching veteran, who worked at Miami University in Ohio and Grinnell College in Iowa before settling into the English department at the State University of New York's Fredonia campus. A past recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, Nelson currently holds the title of Distinguished Teaching Professor.

Nelson has a knack for relatively obscure subject matter. He co-wrote *Epitaph and Icon: A Field Guide to the Old Burying Grounds of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket* (Parnassus Imprints, 1983) when he became interested in the region's historic graveyards but couldn't find a book on the subject. The same goes for *The Robin Hood Tradition in the English Renaissance* (University of Salzburg, 1973).



Charles Lewis

A former Glee Club member who started his first "catch club" at Williams, Nelson also wrote an introduction to *A Collection of Catches, Canons and Gleees, 1763-1974* (Irish University Press, 1970). He says of his choices, "They all are things I felt were underserved."

Route 20 has figured prominently in Nelson's life. He once lived near the portion that passes through Chicago and currently resides along Route 20 in Brocton, N.Y. He recalls taking the road to Pittsfield and riding it through New York state long before the Thruway was built.

His book tells the story of America as it follows the route from east to west. Beginning in Massachusetts, he recounts the highway's importance in the lives of Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath. The next stop is New York, where Route 20 bore witness to the births of several 19th-century religious movements as well as the women's suffrage, abolition, and educational reform movements. Further west, the highway becomes entwined with events of political and environmental importance. All told, Nelson's book (and Route 20 itself) spans 12 states and every chapter of American history.

One of Nelson's favorite spots along the way is Yellowstone National Park, where the road ended until 1940 and which he has visited about 30 times over the years.

"THE SADDEST SPOT ON ROUTE 20 ... IS FORT ROBINSON IN NEBRASKA, WHERE CRAZY HORSE WAS ASSASSINATED. IT'S SOMETHING THAT DEEPLY MOVES ME."

Though he says it is doubtful that the book ever will become a bestseller, at least it has allowed him to indulge his interest in the American West, particularly Yellowstone, where he vacations and does research every summer. "I get to take it off of my taxes," he says with a laugh. ■



Bob Handelman

“BOB AND I HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING SHAKESPEARE FOR SO LONG WE OFTEN CAN'T DECIDE WHICH IDEA WAS WHOSE.”

AS THEY BOTH LIKE IT

by Rob White

Ever since they met in college, English professors Ilona and Bob Bell have served as each other's peer review committee of one, sharing scholarly drafts, lecture notes, and teaching strategies.

“Nothing goes out of the house without the other person's review,” says Bob.

In fact, the only professorial commitment they hadn't shared was a classroom—until last fall, when they teamed up to teach English 201, “Shakespeare's Major Plays.” Each has taught the playwright for years. Ilona also brought to the table expertise in Renaissance poetry, early modern women authors, and John

Donne, while Bob brought his on James Joyce, John Milton, and 18th century literature.

Squeezing together their respective styles and perspectives was energizing—and exhausting. “I've never worked so hard since I was a first-year teacher,” says Ilona.

For one thing, it meant writing a joint teaching plan from scratch—a task accomplished over a hectic summer and throughout the semester in late-night sessions between classes. “We have different angles of approach,” says Bob, who is the

Frederick Latimer Wells Professor of English, “and that made it harder than ever to get in what we each wanted to say.”

“Our death struggles in the family room weren't over interpretation,” adds Ilona, “but over who got to teach the ‘good’ scenes.”

The course's structure granted equal time to them both. At the beginning of the semester, each had a full Monday or Wednesday class period to introduce a new play or scene with a lecture. As the semester unfolded, they started presenting different perspectives within each class. On Fridays they divided the class into two discussion groups.

Among the many benefits of co-teaching, perhaps the most powerful and enjoyable for the Bells was dramatizing competing perspectives about Shakespeare's often interpretation-defying work. Bob began one November class with the proclamation: “King Lear may be a dark play, but it's not a nihilistic one. Even Lear's abasement is as liberating as it is humiliating. And regardless of what happens, Cordelia stands as an absolute force of good.”



"Lear is bleaker than Bob acknowledges," retorted Ilona. "Yes, it's true that Lear discovers his humanity—but at a point where he is powerless to do anything about it. And Cordelia's not all that good. She nails her sisters in comments all the way through the play, and in some senses she's the cause of the whole tragedy."

Throughout the rest of the class, the couple dramatized—with Falstaffian smirks, shrugs, and eye rolls—an essential point: Shakespeare remains an open book about which learned scholars may fairly disagree. Though Ilona is quick to add, "Bob and I actually agree on much more about Shakespeare than not."

There's an added benefit to co-teaching English 201: in what other venue is it perfectly acceptable for one professor to challenge another—her husband, no less—wielding a toilet brush as a jester's sword? ■

Williams professors and others weigh in on the issues of the day.

For a complete listing of media appearances, visit www.williams.edu/admin/news/inthenews/php

Anxiety over hot-button issues can push voters to find out more about candidates, including their personal qualities, and thus change voting patterns—helping to explain why opinion polls have been less reliable during the 2008 presidential campaign, says political science professor [George Marcus](#) in a Feb. 11 *Newsweek* article about the [power of emotion in elections](#).

IN THE NEWS

While Kenya long appeared a prosperous and peaceful country, violence following hotly contested presidential elections in December highlighted the fact that "there were a lot of poor people who were ignored by the ... government and the leaders," says [Kenda Mutongi](#), history professor and chair of Africana studies, on the Jan. 31 edition of the WBUR radio show *On Point*.

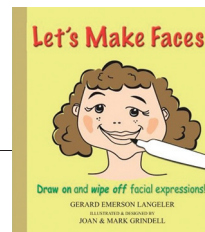
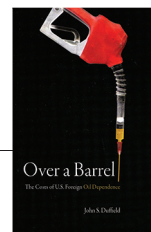
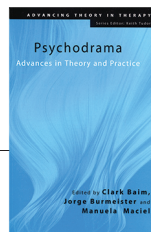
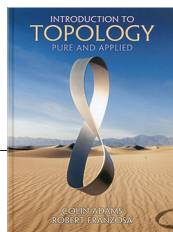
In a Feb. 5 [CNNMoney.com](#) article about retirement planning, economics professor [David Love](#) says that most [baby boomers 51 and older will have enough to retire comfortably](#) if they include the value of home equity in their savings.

SPEAK TO ME

On certain days the dining halls on campus sound more like the international-arrivals terminal at JFK airport than lunchrooms at a New England college. That's because each week students, faculty, and others in the Williams community gather over meals at "foreign language tables" to hone their skills or speak with others in their native tongue. Hosted by teaching assistants and language fellows, the discussions take place during lunch and dinner and span the globe linguistically. Recent tables have included Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.



LIFE OF THE MIND



FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Introduction to Topology: Pure and Applied.

By Colin Adams, Thomas T. Read Professor of Mathematics, et al. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008. An introduction to topology concepts and their applications to DNA, heart stimulation, population modeling, cosmology, and computer graphics.

Psychodrama: Advances in Theory and Practice.

Edited by Clark Baim '85 et al. Routledge, 2007. An overview of developments in the theory and practice of psychodrama integrates different schools of thought.

Javatrekker: Dispatches from the World of Fair Trade Coffee. By Dean Cycon '75. Chelsea Green, 2007. Tales from Africa, the Americas, and Asia explore the hardships of growing and selling the world's second most valuable commodity.

Practical Ruby Projects: Ideas for the Eclectic Programmer. By Topher Cyll '04. Apress, 2007. A guidebook for programmers looking to learn advanced Ruby techniques.

Over a Barrel. By John S. Duffield '80. Stanford University Press, 2008. An analysis of the economic

and policy-related costs of U.S. foreign oil dependence and how they might be reduced.

Let's Make Faces. By Gerard Langelier '36. Future Horizons Inc., 2008. A dry-erase book helps autistic children identify facial expressions by tracing and drawing facial features.

A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign. By Edward J. Larson '74. Free Press, 2007. A re-creation of the 1800 race between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, which stamped American democracy with its distinctive partisan character.

Once Upon a Fastball. By Bob Mitchell '66. Kensington Publishing, 2008. A novel intertwines baseball with history, poetry, philosophy, and music.

The Speculation Economy: How Finance Triumphed Over Industry. By Larry Mitchell '78. Berrett-Koehler, 2007. How the birth of the giant modern corporation spurred the rise of the stock market, which became by the 1920s the reason for the creation of business itself.

Leadership the Outward Bound Way. Six chapters by John Reynolds '51. The Mountaineers Books, 2007. Introduces the

fundamentals of good leadership and how they can be applied in all facets of life.

Purgatory Chasm. By Susan Edwards Richmond '82. Adastra Press, 2007. Poems inspired by the geologic and human history of Purgatory Chasm State Reservation.

Bringing Human Rights Home, Vols. 1-3. Edited by Cynthia Soohoo '88. Praeger Publishers, 2008. Chronicles the history of human rights in the U.S. from the perspective of domestic social justice activism as well as current domestic human rights work.

Record of Wrongs. By Andy Straka '80. Five Star, 2008. A thriller in which Quentin Price is freed by new DNA evidence and then given the chance to help solve the crime that put him behind bars.

Forgive Me. By Amanda Eyre Ward '94. Random House, 2007. A novel about a journalist who sets out on her own to cover a Cape Cod couple's trip to Cape Town for the Truth and Reconciliation hearings.

Seven Trees Against the Dying Light, A Bilingual Edition. By Steven F. White '77 et al. Northwestern University Press, 2007. A book of translations of the Nicaraguan poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra (1912-2002).

Culture and Customs of Nicaragua. By Steven F. White '77 et al. Greenwood Press, 2008. A look at one of Latin America's most disillusioned countries and the passionate culture that defines and sustains its people.

