



Works Cited

Department of English & Theatre Newsletter

University Reading Series Celebrates Quarter-Century of Success

Volume 2, Issue 2

Fall 2008



What do a Pulitzer Prize winner, several National Book Award finalists, several National Book Critics Circle Award nominees, a two-time Hugo Award winner, a half dozen Guggenheim and Rockefeller fellows, and a dozen or more National Endowment of the Arts fellowship winners have in common? They—and many other distinguished authors—have been guests of the University Reading Series, now celebrating its 25th year of bringing writers to campus to give free public readings and to meet with student writers and faculty for informal discussion about the craft of writing.

Launched in the department in the early 1980s, the URS brings several well-regarded writers—of poetry, fiction, and/or nonfiction—to campus each year. Their readings routinely attract an audience of fifty, sixty, or seventy and more people. “The majority of URS audiences are Scranton students and faculty,” says John Meredith Hill, professor, “but it’s always a pleasure to see people from Marywood, Keystone, Wilkes, and so on as well as our neighbors from the Hill and the Abingtons.”

The series was enabled more than two decades ago by the strong support of the then English department chair, John McNerney, and the presiding CAS Dean, William Parente. In the many years since, former department chair Frank Jordan and current chair Jody DeRitter as well as several CAS deans and provosts have provided encouragement and financial support. “In recent years,” Hill explains, “Dean Dreisbach allowed me to direct my FAP money to the series to help pay for our guests’ visits to Scranton.”

Hill began to invite writers to campus shortly after he came to the department. The first guest in Fall 1983 was Fred Muratori, a

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Congratulations!

Joe **Kraus**, associate professor, has been named the new Director of the University’s Honors Program. His short story, “How Beautiful Are Your Tents, O Jacob,” won first prize in the *Moment/Karma* Foundation 2007 International Short Fiction Contest and is forthcoming in the Nov.-Dec. issue of *Moment*. His creative nonfiction short, “Richie in the Leaves,” won second place in the *Toasted Cheese*--an on-line magazine--Mid-Summer Writing Contest. Dan **Fraustino**, professor, was voted Best College Professor in the recent “Best-in-the-Abingtons” feature in *The Abington Journal*. 📖



Notes from the Chair

No, really, I can explain.

For some reason, Scranton's been taking it on the chin recently from the national media, and it's time for someone to rise to the city's defense. Um, no, not *you*. Let me take a crack at it.

Item 1: *in mid-October, Saturday Night Live's Jason Sudeikis, playing Joe Biden in a sketch that made fun of the vice presidential debate, said: "I come from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and that's as hard-scrabble a place as you're going to find. . . . [It]'s a hell hole. An absolute jerkwater of a town. . . . a genetic cesspool."*

OK, we'll cop to "hardscrabble," but "jerkwater" seems a little excessive, especially with all the competition out there these days for this title. After all, it wasn't *our* Senator who described the internet as "not a truck [but] a series of tubes." Our bridges may be crumbling, but at least they lead somewhere—sometimes even to New York or Philadelphia. As for the genetic cesspool, I've been in Scranton for almost two decades, and I have many friends and acquaintances, and only a few of them seem like mutants.

Item 2: *also in October, during the usual interminable fall pledge drive, Peter Sagal suggested that NPR had developed a new technology for the purpose of extracting money directly from listeners' wallets by purely electronic means. According to Sagal, the system had malfunctioned, and the NPR station in Chicago, instead of being deluged with wads of cash, was instead trying to deal with "a confused Car Talk fan from Scranton, Pennsylvania" who had materialized out of thin air and "who would really like to meet Haywood Jabuzoff."* [Haywood Jabuzoff is the (imaginary) customer service rep at the Magliozzi brothers' (real) garage.]

OK, this could have happened, but it's not as bad as it sounds. Some of us do listen to *Car Talk*, and a few of us may be a little too trusting when it comes to the fake credits presented at the end of the show (Marge Inovera, Claudio Vernight, Erasmus B. Dragon). On the other hand, Haywood Jabuzoff is a special case. Back in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a lot of people emigrated from Eastern Europe to northeastern Pennsylvania to work in the coal mines. They brought with them their sturdy work ethic, their spirituality, and their family values. They left behind their poverty, their oppressors, and their vowels. Anyway, there are currently four dozen Djzabyzzovs in the Scranton white pages. The guy in the NPR story was probably just a cousin.

—Jody DeRitter

Comparativist Rojas Brings Energy, Enriches Course Offerings

"I like the mix of students at Scranton, the variety of life experiences they bring to classroom discussions," says Ana Rojas, lecturer in English. With a PhD in comparative literature from Cornell, Rojas is on a one-year contract. This semester she is teaching two sections of Intro. to Fiction (ENLT 120) and a section of Composition (WRTG 107). "At Cornell so many students, even the international students, came from similar socio-economic backgrounds and often held similar views. Here the students' responses to literature and the conversations that literature sparks are engaging because they are so various."

The child of academic parents, Rojas grew up near the campus of Chico State and defines herself as a "campus brat." "When I was a child I thought college students were so grown-up, so sophisticated. Going to college, to graduate school and beyond has somewhat modified that perception, of course."

As a kid in Chico, an undergraduate with a major in comparative lit at UC-Irvine, and a graduate student at Cornell, Rojas says she has enjoyed access to the East and West coasts. "I like the ocean, any ocean, and the beach and sailing and just hanging out. As with Chico and Ithaca, Scranton is not on a coast, but it's close enough. Probably I wouldn't be quite so content in Colorado or Nebraska." The friendly and helpful nature of English department colleagues has contributed to her current sense of well-being, Rojas adds.



Her academic area of expertise is Decadent literature in English, French, and Italian. Her dissertation is titled "Designing Women: Reimagining the Femme Fatale in Fin-de-siecle Literature." As a graduate student and head TA Rojas had the opportunity to develop and teach a variety of literature and film courses on her subject matter at Cornell. She enjoys introducing students to films that portray powerful and dangerous women, she says. "I'm a film buff, no doubt about it. In addition to films featuring dangerous women—Louise Brooks in 'Pandora's Box,' Barbara Stanwyck in 'Double Indemnity'—I love films with a witty, fast-talking woman such as Myrna Loy in 'The Thin Man' series and all those screwball comedies from the '30s and '40s with the great verbal give-and-take—films like 'Bringing Up Baby.' They're hard to beat."

In Spring '09 Rojas will offer a Special Topics (ENLT 284) course—Femmes Fatales: Lunatics, Harlots and other Dangerous Women—and introduce her students to a stimulating variety of novels, stories and films.

Asked to briefly characterize the students she's encountered in her first months on the Scranton campus, she refers to them as "assiduous" and considers that an admirable quality. "I've only been here a short time and I don't yet know if they're as inquisitive as students I knew at Cornell, but certainly they're attentive. That's a good start." 📖



N INTERVIEW

Ellen Miller Casey, professor, joined the English department in 1969. A Victorian specialist, she holds a B.S. from Loyola University, Chicago, an M.A. from the University of Iowa, and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. A long-time director of the University Honors Program, Casey is a Distinguished University Fellow and a commissioner of the Middle States Association. She is also a proud grandmother to three grandsons.

WC—*You were the first woman or one of the first women faculty at Scranton. Given your scholarly interests in Victorian women and “The New Woman,” was your pioneering experience a happy one? What were the challenges?*

Casey—By and large my experience was happy. I don’t think my scholarly interests much affected that experience, since I was hired before the 20thC feminist movement really began. Since I had been told at a previous institution (a woman’s college) that as I was pregnant they would fire me (if I hadn’t already quit to finish my dissertation), the fact that the U was willing to hire me when I was seven months pregnant with our second child was a great advance.

There were a few colleagues who didn’t know how to interact with a woman as a professional colleague, but they learned. A number of students and the occasional colleague would insist on using my social title (Mrs.) rather than my professional one (Dr.), and there were a few instances of genuine nastiness, but by and large things went smoothly. It undoubtedly helped that my husband was hired in the Theology department at the same time I was hired in English and that we came with two children and soon had a third. I was too busy to worry about the challenges of being the only woman in the room because the challenges of keeping up with work and family kept me occupied.

WC—*In another pioneering role you’ve headed the university’s Honors Program since its founding, right? What is its history? Its successes?*

Casey—The Honors Program existed when I arrived; I believe it was begun by Fr. Edward Gannon, S.J. When I came Thomas Garrett was director. I became assistant director in 1975 and director in 1977. Soon after that we pushed admission back to Fall of Sophomore year and added the Sophomore course (which have since become courses). We also changed the content of the Junior Seminar to a

book-based discussion and moved it to the Fall.

The program’s greatest successes are its graduates, who have used the program as preparation for significant careers in education, medicine, law, business, and social service. The program has also contributed to the university’s Fulbright success. Although Honors grads comprise about 2% of our graduates, they account for just under half of our Fulbrights.

WC—*You’ve been doing research for a number of years on The Athenaeum, an influential Victorian periodical, and its reviews and reviewers, and a few years back you were named a Distinguished University Fellow, one of the initial three. More recently you’ve served Middle States in an important capacity. All this in addition to directing the Honors Program.*

Casey—I first started working on reviews of fiction in the *Athenaeum* for a conference paper on the year 1883, inspired by a comment by Carl Dawson in *Victorian Noon* that one way of surveying the literature of a year was to examine “the chronological sweep of literature reviewed in the *Athenaeum* . . . for a month-by-month discussion of what books were available and how they were being read.” The paper was well received, and I just kept going. I have now done a number of reception articles based on the *Athenaeum*—of American novels, of women novelists, of the sensation novel, of Charles Dickens. I’m currently working on the three-volume novel and looking forward to Austen and to Scott and the historical novel.



The new Dr. Casey with daughter Roberta.

The Distinguished University Fellows program was established to honor full professors who excelled in teaching, scholarship, and service. The idea was that we shouldn’t rest on our laurels. I was honored to keep company with Dr. Len Gougeon and Dr. Tom Hogan, the other inaugural DUFs.

The Middle States Association is the regional accrediting body for colleges and universities from New York to Washington, DC. Decisions on accreditation are made by the twenty-six commissioners, most of whom are academic administrators (largely presidents and provosts). I’ve been a commissioner since January 2005 and am now in my second term. I was asked to serve after I had chaired the university’s Self-study and Periodic Review Report, served as a reader of PRRs, and as a member of several visiting teams for other schools, and presented a training session on reading PRRs. I find it interesting to see the internal workings of many schools and to present a faculty viewpoint on policy and accreditation issues.

As I said earlier, I’ve directed the Honors Program since

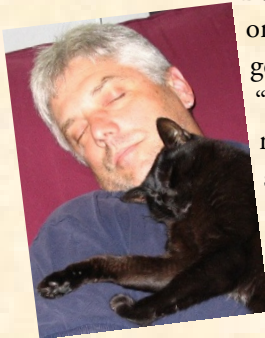
(Continued on page 8)

LIPSTICK ON A PIG?

Works Cited asks contributors to identify a literary or performing arts work they consider overrated—and why.



Rich Larsen, associate professor & director of Theatre—



Being Norwegian I am inclined to say that *most* literary or performing arts pieces are overrated. In terms of genre, I would have to say anything labeled “Performance Art” leads the pack. Rolling around naked in dog feces or chocolate makes some statement, to be sure, but . . . all in all, I’d rather be in the bleachers at Fenway. Most overrated playwright: Tennessee Williams, hands down. One play, 27 variations . . . we get it. ♡



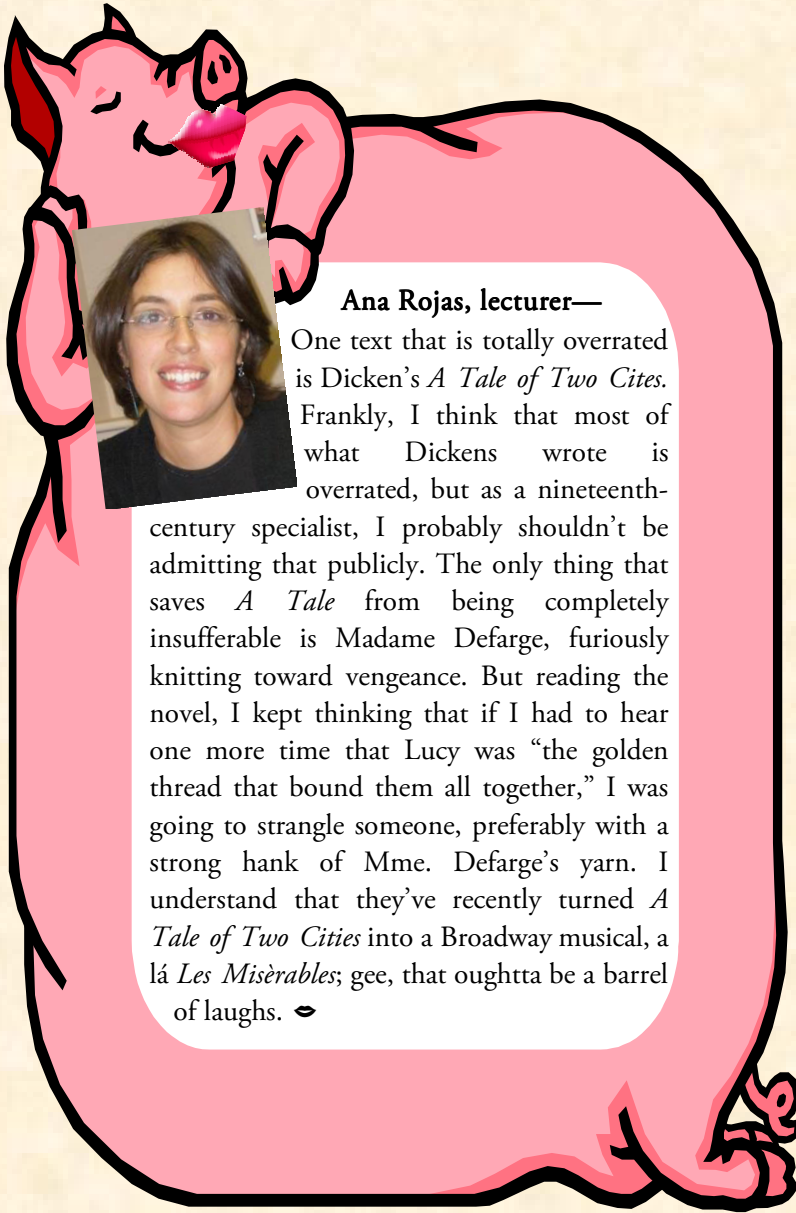
Shawna Hogan, English '14—

Call me an iconoclast, but I have to pick Kerouac’s *On The Road* as an overrated work. I can definitely appreciate it as a book that changed things, that upset the stagnant waters of the ’50s—a much needed upset, I gather—but after hearing most would-be writers/hipsters I’ve encountered since high school declare Kerouac their god and *On The Road* their holy book, I decided to revisit the work and, sadly, couldn’t muster the same sort of enthusiasm. Frank and energetic, yes, but the writing just doesn’t hold up after so much imitation. . . .



the storytelling (now that I’m not reading it during study hall) strikes me as somewhat corny and juvenile instead of brilliant. Also, I’m able now to pick up on the troubling tendency of the writer to write his women as less than human, a behavior that tends to sour me on some other works as well. Basically, the book seems beat (I apologize for the bad pun . . . partially). ♡





Ana Rojas, lecturer—

One text that is totally overrated is Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Frankly, I think that most of what Dickens wrote is overrated, but as a nineteenth-century specialist, I probably shouldn't be admitting that publicly. The only thing that saves *A Tale* from being completely insufferable is Madame Defarge, furiously knitting toward vengeance. But reading the novel, I kept thinking that if I had to hear one more time that Lucy was "the golden thread that bound them all together," I was going to strangle someone, preferably with a strong hank of Mme. Defarge's yarn. I understand that they've recently turned *A Tale of Two Cities* into a Broadway musical, à la *Les Misérables*; gee, that oughtta be a barrel of laughs. ☺



Stephen Whittaker, professor—

I used to love Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*. But I have just realized that American culture is all about the vanity of porcine cosmetology. I owe this insight to Horace Engdahl, who helped me realize



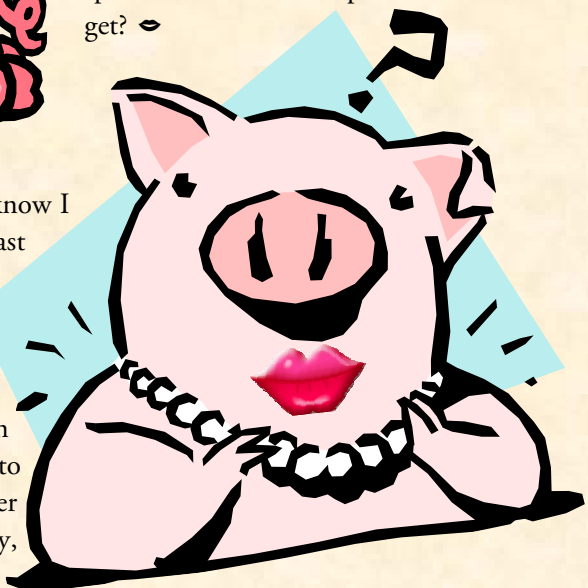
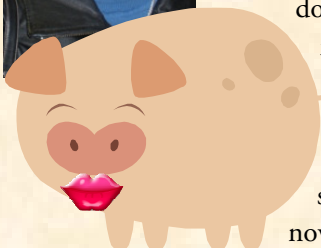
that Cather's portrait of the American artist as a young woman is all about how we are "too isolated,

too insular" and cannot hope to "participate in the big dialogue of literature." Worse yet, the mother of Thea Kronborg, Cather's alter ego in the work, speaks Swedish. How peninsular can one get? ☺



Pauline Palko, English '10—

I hated Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*. I know I say that at the risk of offending (or at least disappointing) several of my professors and peers. I can hear those voices raised in McCain-like admonition saying, "You just don't get it." That may be true. I know it's an important book for American literature. I know I do not have to enjoy the story to appreciate its other merits, language, structure, theory, story, or insight, but I found this novel disappointing on all counts. I found the prose tedious, tautological, and obvious, much too transparent for a novel with the word *invisible* in the title. ☺



Response to URS

"Cate Marvin said she wanted her poems to be like 'bulldozers' plowing down the page. Mark Halliday said he wouldn't recommend the MFA program he taught for. James Harms said he doesn't worry about writing when he's not writing. In person Marvin was full of zeal; Halliday, irony; Harms, a calm pleasantness. These characteristics are equally applicable to each one's poetry. For me, it was interesting to learn that the poets' voice wasn't the result of any sort of posturing; instead, each one's poetic voice seemed to flow naturally out of each one's everyday voice."

**—Patrick O'Kernick, English/
Philosophy '09**

"I recall well Baron Wormser. He had a great opening in his poem 'The Beltway':

*To hypostatize the moody
hodgepodge of auto—
Reverie requires another
pedal—*

*The turbo overhead one-ton
metaphysic.*

*May sound stupid but Wormser
reminded me that poems are about
words and sound. Sometimes in our
efforts to emote, we forget that.*

*There was also a playfulness, an
embrace of the current and
colloquial, that I liked about his
voice."*

**—Brendan Curry, English/
Philosophy '01,
former editor, *Esprit*,
associate editor, *W.W. Norton***

*"Frequently published poet and
memoirist Colette Inez tops my
list of inspiring URS writers. We
had a lengthy conversation the
evening of her reading and I'm
thrilled to say we still keep in
touch. She is so encouraging to
young writers and has a mind-
boggling memory for details."*

**—Pauline Palko, English '10,
Secretary, Dean of Students**

Quarter-Century of Success

(Continued from page 1)

poet at Cornell; in Spring 1984 novelist and short story writer, Carol Emschwiller, an adjunct professor at NYU, came to campus. "Places such as Swarthmore and the University of Chicago remind us that good schools don't require football teams," says Hill, "but every good school I was aware of back then had a reading series. I thought we should have one too."

Professor and fiction writer Carl Schaffer has played a key role in making the series an on-going success, reports Hill. "Carl's arrival in the late 1980s meant he could reach out to a number of outstanding people, including Richard Bausch and Joe Haldeman." Bausch is a repeat PEN/Faulkner finalist and recipient of the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters as well as Guggenheim and NEA fellowships. Haldeman, one of the nation's premier science fiction writers, has won multiple Hugo and Nebula awards for best novel. Other writers Schaffer has brought to campus to read and to meet with students in his fiction classes in the department's Writing program include O. Henry Award winner Meredith Steinbach and Evan Zimroth, 1996 winner of the National Jewish Book Award.

Joe Kraus, associate professor, has invited nonfiction authors James Lang, Kim Dana Kupperman, Dustin Beall Smith, Mimi Schwartz, David Wyatt and others. "The series has been a great way to take our discussions outside the classroom," he says. Kraus instructs the nonfiction classes in the Writing program. "Getting our work to the point of development where we can take it public—literally, to publish it—is probably the central focus of a writing workshop. Bringing published writers to meet with our students is both instructive and inspiring."


Hill notes the challenge routinely encountered when inviting guest authors. "Money is always a concern—for them and for us," he says. "We work with a very

modest budget, but over the years Carl and Joe have been great about bringing people to campus for very little money. Sometimes they call upon old friends and ask them to read for an honorarium much smaller than what they usually command. I know both Carl and Joe have written some irresistibly flattering letters. I've done those things too."

Kraus says, "A few years ago as a participant at a writers' conference I met Kim Dana Kupperman, the distinguished essayist and managing editor at *The Gettysburg Review*, and her partner Dusty Smith, the recent Bread Loaf Writers Conference award-winning memoirist. I was able to bring these rising talents in creative nonfiction to Scranton for less than the going rate for one visiting writer."

Spotting writers "on the rise" has been a recurrent practice. "I invited Stephen Dunn, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, in the early '90s, before he won the big enchilada," Hill explains. "He was very gracious about meeting with our student poets, listening to their questions and sharing his experience and advice. Same with Elizabeth Alexander, the 2006 Pulitzer finalist. After reading a few of her poems in the journals back in 1989 I wrote her a note. She agreed to come read for us that year, long before she moved on to her endowed chair at Yale and her many honors."

Asked about URS prospects for the future, Hill says, "I'm sure Elizabeth, Stephen and some others would be beyond our reach now. But that's okay. Carl and Joe and I keep abreast of the contemporary scene and read a range of literary journals. I believe we'll continue to scout outstanding talent and bring it to the university."

Ideally, Hill concludes, the series would welcome an "angel or two," perhaps Scranton graduates who would like to provide the series with some funding. "We're pleased the URS has been able to operate effectively for the past quarter-century. Let's hope, as Mr. Spock said, it can live long and prosper." 

*"Bringing published
writers to meet with our
students is both instructive
and inspiring."*

DEPARTMENT HAPPENINGS



2008-09 Bagdzinski Memorial Scholars
Sherly Daceus and Heather Lucas



Players' principal actors in *I Hate Hamlet*.



Table reading for *Red Herring*, directed by Sheila Stasack.



Still Bailing by Matthew Mercuri
Cover photo for *Esprit*, Spring '08

ESPRIT

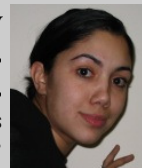
Hear contributors read
from their work in the
Esprit Fall '08 issue:
Wednesday, December 3,
Brennan Hall, Room 509.
Reading begins at 8 pm.
Be there!

CLOSE READING

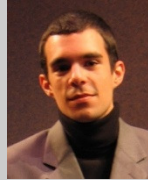
Marc **Graci**, English '03, has a full-time teaching position at Liberty County High School in Hinesville, GA. He completed an MA in Education (Sec. Ed.) from the University in 2008 after teaching ESL for two years in



Japan. Michael **O'Steen**, associate professor, directed and choreographed *Lucky Stiff*, a production of the University Players, in Spring '08, as well as the recent September production of *I Hate Hamlet*. Both plays enjoyed successful runs on the Royal Theatre main stage. As an Equity Guest Artist, he directed *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Cidermill Playhouse in Binghamton, NY, in early summer. O'Steen cast Samantha **Morales**, Theatre/History '11, and Michael **Flynn**, Theatre '10, in the production and reports that they gave "spirited" and "impressive"



performances. Morales and Flynn, along with Anthony **Mercado**, History '09, had principal roles in the recent



production of *I Hate Hamlet*. Michael

Friedman, professor, was guest editor for a special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* on the topic "Screen Adaptations for the Teen Market." He also



wrote an introductory essay titled "To think o'th'teen that I have turned you to": The Scholarly Consideration of Teen Shakespeare Films." With Maria Johnson of Theology, Joe **Kraus**, associate professor, and Stephen **Whittaker**, professor, Friedman co-authored "From Our Office to Yours: The University of Scranton and *The Office*," which appeared as an appendix in a recent book --*The Office and Philosophy: Scenes from the Unexamined Life*--published by Blackwell. Kraus was recently interviewed for a documentary program on the death and life of Lazarus Averbuch to be shown on Chicago public television station WTTW; the program responds to recent renewed interest in the subject matter of a book Kraus co-authored titled *An Accidental Anarchist*. Ali

Mailen, English '08, works as Children's Advocate at the Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center in Lebanon, PA. The center is one of only three in the commonwealth devoted exclusively to sexual assault resources. John Meredith **Hill**, professor, has a poem, "Exsqueeze Me," featured in the current exhibit of poems and paintings on the theme of music at the Butternut Gallery in Montrose, PA. The poem will appear with others in a chapbook produced by the gallery later this year. Rich



(Continued on page 8)

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c/o Department of English & Theatre
University of Scranton
Scranton, PA 18510

or as an attachment in Word format to:

scramuzzal2@scranton.edu

THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON

Pride
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EXPERIENCE OUR JESUIT
TRADITION

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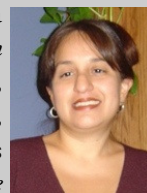
Production & Design Manager:
Lynn Scramuzza

Proofreader: Courtney Coccia

CLOSE READING

(Continued from page 7)

Larsen, associate professor and director of Theatre, did the lighting and set design for *I Hate Hamlet*. Pru **Skinner** was technical director. Production stage manager was Janelle **Caso**. Theatre '09. Conway **Rowe** designed the sound, and Je **Tellier** designed costumes. Keith **Gilman**, English minor, '91, has won the St. Martin's Press/Private Eye Writers of American Best First Novel Contest. His novel, *Father's Day*, the story of an ex-Philadelphia cop who becomes a private eye, will be published by St. Martin's Minotaur in Spring '09. Matthew **Breuninger**, English '08, has begun graduate study in theology at Ave Maria University in Florida. Pat **Lawhon**, adjunct professor, is listed in *Who's Who in American Women*, in *America*, in *American Education* and in *the World*. Susan **Méndez** presented a paper entitled, "Consuming Economics in Angie Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee*," at the Northeast MLA Convention in Buffalo, NY, in April, 2008. Tim **Mayers**, English/Philosophy/Honors '88, an associate professor at Millersville University, has won the 2008 Paradigm Novel Prize for *Intelligence Manifesto*, a "philosophical mystery" about a private investigator who gets pulled into separate cases about two missing college coeds and a missing book. Tim's novel will be published by Rain Farm Press in 2009, and he will be featured in the November issue of *Paradigm*. Stephen **Whittaker**, professor, has an essay, "The Shakespearean Demiurge in Joyce's *Forge*," forthcoming in *European Joyce Studies*. 



INTERVIEW

(Continued from page 3)

1977. I've gotten to know some of the U's best students as a result. Because they come from all majors, I have also gotten to know faculty colleagues throughout the institution, either directly by team-teaching in Honors seminars or indirectly through projects their students do.

WC—You've been here long enough to have important things to say about where we are as a department and a university. How are we doing? What might we do better?

Casey—The department and the university take teaching very seriously. Faculty put a major part of their energy into the classroom. This makes Scranton a very good place to be a student. Occasionally, though, I think we make things too comfortable for our students—not pushing them hard enough to encounter people unlike themselves and ideas that challenge them.

WC—Having devoted many years to teaching, research and service, you're planning to retire in Spring '09. What's in the immediate future? Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Casey—I'll be teaching a course each semester next year as I ease myself into retirement. I'll do ENLT 140 in the Fall and Victorian Studies in the Spring. At the same time we'll be working on our house, as our plan is to sell it and move to the Twin Cities to be near our two daughters and two of our grandsons.

In ten years? I hope doing some useful volunteer work and reading, quilting, sewing and . . . 