

PSH NEWS

Churchill plays with mediated realities

*Elin Marcel
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Eton Churchill has taught classes in media technology, theater and film. But now he unites them in "Lonelihearts: A Post-Modernist Morality Play for Pneumatic Puppets and People."

The play, written by Churchill during 1987-1989, examines the moral issues involved in media technology and education. The staged reading is being produced today and tomorrow by the Theater of the Seventh Sister at Foundersmith Hall, 31 S. Duke St., Lancaster.

"It's about how we construct the world and how it's constructed for us," said Churchill, assistant professor of humanities and communication at Penn State Harrisburg. He teaches courses in media and drama.

"It's about kinetic things, images that affect your central nervous system, like the drumbeats in a movie that get your heart rate going," Churchill said. "It has to do with your whole body."

"Lonelihearts," which involves such technical innovations as "pneumatic puppets" and a video wall, had an interesting evolution, Churchill said.

He was trying to write a scholarly monograph on "mediated realities."

"And I did write it, and I didn't like it. And yet the ideas in it had a lot of vitality. But I just thought the presentation was boring and without power.

"I'd written plays years ago, and I thought, gee, maybe this is a play and not a monograph," Churchill said. "So, I started doodling and playing with characters and scenes and lines, and lo and behold, it was a play. I think the ideas on the stage achieve poignancy and power that they wouldn't in a monograph."

Others say that Churchill's ideas are intriguing.

"His ideas about television communication and society are fascinating," said John Patterson, acting head of the humanities division. "They are on the edge of technological changes."

T.J. Brightman, a junior communications major from BelAir, Md. is participating in a 1-credit independent study with Churchill, working on the video wall for the play.

"I think it's interesting that you



Eton Churchill

photo by Elin Marcel

have a play that not only has the characteristic of being a play, but it's unique in that you introduce video technology," Brightman said.

Churchill said, "The images have to do with the assault on the subrational, and I wanted to play with the subrational things that go on with image making. The theater seemed like a good place to do it."

Churchill said he's always had an interest in theater and film.

"Rainy, foggy days up in Maine, I used to go up in my room, get in bed, and try to stay warm," Churchill recalled. "I'd write stories about dogs that were lost. Then my friends and I would try to act them out, to stage them somehow."

Writing doesn't work like light bulbs, Churchill said, equating the process with the making of pearls.

"It's like an irritant; a grain of sand that gets in your body," Churchill said. "You envelop it with your thoughts,

instincts, and impulses, and hopefully, out comes a pearl."

"Or it could be a carbuncle," he said, laughing.

Churchill's list of "pearls" is extensive. He has produced and written numerous films, plays, books and articles, copping several awards for his works.

He modestly explains his appearance as an extra in the movie "Witness," filmed in Lancaster.

"They were looking for guys with beards and I had one," Churchill said. "I'm a carpenter, I built my own house so I know how to swing a hammer and do all that stuff, so I qualified."

According to Churchill, one of his most enjoyable experiences was producing "Home to the Sea," an hour-long documentary on maritime Maine.

"I like the sea, I like the history, I like Maine," Churchill said. "I got to sail out to Bermuda and St. Thomas. I got to go into people's attics and pull

out old antique footage no one had ever seen."

Churchill, a Maine native, still retains his Maine personality, said Peter Parisi, assistant professor of humanities and communications at Penn State Harrisburg.

"Eton is a Yankee," Parisi said. "He has a crusty Yankee exterior that I've learned conceals a heart of gold. He's sort of like a hedgehog--prickly outside but a gentle animal."

Churchill, who has been a Penn State Harrisburg faculty member for 12 years, carried the communications department alone during many of them, Parisi said.

In his spare time, Churchill bicycles 125 miles a week in Lancaster, where he resides with his wife and two of his three children. He also enjoys sailing and has an interest in ecology.

To reserve tickets for "Lonelihearts," call (717) 396-7764 or 392-4983.

Harassment from page 1

handled by Penn State Harrisburg officials, O'Hara said.

"I can't say I'm aware of any cases of sexual harassment in the classroom, but you always hear rumors," said Bill Gettins, a behavioral science major from Dauphin County. "It's always a good idea to educate people about problems and potential problems."

What if a student believes he or she has been sexually harassed?

The pamphlet advises them to seek out campus contact people, who are instructed to take down all pertinent

information regarding the incident and then contact the Affirmative Action office at University Park.

Holtzman said the next step would involve coming up with a "strategy" with the Affirmative Action office who then decide whether a person is guilty or not of sexual harassment.

Holtzman said each case of sexual harassment is different depending on its severity.

"If someone came in and reported a rape, the first call would be to the police," Holtzman said. "Affirmative action is going to want to respond to it, but they will not supersede criminal

offenses like rape."

In a recent memorandum to campus executive officers and academic deans, President Joab Thomas said that an educational campaign on sexual harassment would ensure an "environment in which students, faculty and staff could learn and work to his or her fullest potential," and "reduce the university's exposure to legal liability."

Thomas added that failure to respond quickly and effectively to identified problems can result in costly time consuming litigation, as well as negative publicity for the university.

Betty Fortner, acting division head of

behavioral science and a sexual harassment contact person, took part in a three-day workshop at University Park. She said the university is "very serious" about spreading awareness on this issue, partly because of the liability.

Fortner said the university must act swiftly in sexual harassment cases or be legally liable.

"This has very strong implications, especially for faculty," Fortner said. "Faculty tend to think they are safe from dismissal if they are tenured."

At many universities, faculty can be dismissed regardless of tenure when sexual harassment is involved, she said.