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Plath Edits Book Analyzing Casablanca

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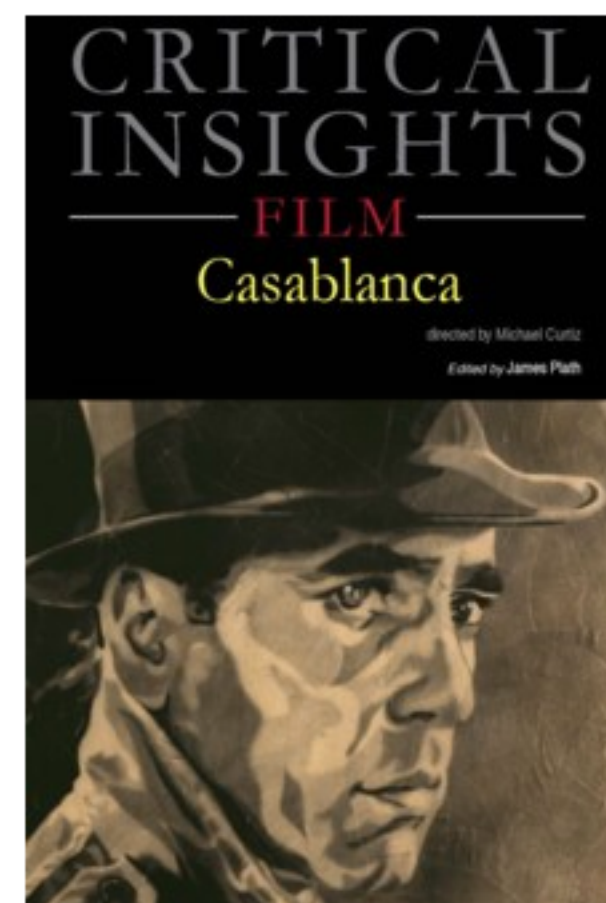
April 13, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— James Plath, R. Forrest Colwell Endowed Chair of [English](#) at Illinois Wesleyan University, has edited the first volume in the new *Critical Insights* series from Salem Press, [Critical Insights Film: Casablanca](#).

The book focuses on the film *Casablanca*, which is considered by many to be one of the best films of the 20th century and is ranked 3rd on the American Film Institute's list of the "100 Greatest American Films of All Time." *Critical Insights Film: Casablanca* contains 14 scholarly essays offering in-depth analysis and insight into the famous motion picture, particularly examining the reasons for the film's success and assessing the work's influence on modern popular culture.

The project began in April 2015 when Salem Press contacted Plath and asked him to edit the volume of their new film series. "Because they were happy with the job I did editing [Critical Insights: Raymond Carver](#), and because my bio indicated that I teach film and had been a film critic since 2000, they asked me to edit the very first volume in this new series," Plath explained. "Flattered, I said, 'Sure.' " The project then took a little more than a year to complete.

The Critical Insights series is intended to produce volumes introducing a subject as well as providing original contributions to the scholarly discourse in the form of individual essays. The series is aimed towards public and undergraduate libraries. "I do appreciate that the Critical Insights series keeps books in print," Plath said. "Too often you put a lot of work into a book and then once it goes out of print, it lapses into obscurity. Not so here."



Cover of *Critical Insights Film: Casablanca*



James Plath, R. Forrest Colwell
Endowed Chair of English

The most challenging part of the project for Plath was organizing the book's structure. "Cohesion is a huge issue for an edited volume, and if an editor doesn't try to structure the book, there can be a lot of overlapping, or, just the opposite, a lot of gaps," he said. Plath is thankful, however, for the contributors to the work because of their flexibility and creativity. "I'm very proud of the essays in this volume." Contributors to the work include longtime film reviewer and former *Hollywood Reporter* critic Kirk Honeycutt; Kathy Merlock Jackson, a professor of communication at Virginia Wesleyan College; and University of New Hampshire cinema studies professor Delia Malia Konzett.

Plath said the most rewarding part of his endeavor was writing an essay on the music of *Casablanca*, in addition to all the introductory essays and appendices of the work. Music was not a topic on which Plath had any former expertise, but when a contributor needed to withdraw from the project near the work's deadline, Plath had to write this essay himself. "I love a challenge," he said. "I dove in head first, and I'm pleased with the way it turned out."

Plath completed his undergraduate degree at the California State University at Chico before earning an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He has also published *Historic Photos of Ernest Hemingway* (Turner Publishing Co., 2009), *Remembering Ernest Hemingway* (Ketch and Yawl Press, 1998), *Conversations with John*

Updike (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1994), and *Courbet, on the Rocks* (White Eagle Coffee Store Press, 1994).

A Tomatometer-approved critic at RottenTomatoes.com and a member of the Online Film Critics Society since 2005, Plath was among the first group of entertainment writers invited to tour Pixar Canada. *Casablanca* is one of his favorite films.

By Lydia Hartlaub '16