

**Casting**

Joe Mills  
North Carolina School of the Arts

A student stops by my office to say  
he missed class because he was in New York  
at an audition for *As the World Turns*  
which is also why his work will be late;  
in fact, he doesn't know if he can do  
much of anything until he finds out.  
I'm surprised when I realize he's not there  
to apologize or see what he missed,  
but simply explain, and before he leaves,  
he stops and says, "Pray for me, Professor."  
It's a brilliant tactic, one that pulls me  
off balance, because I have braced myself  
against an extension request or plea  
for extra credit since he's missed so much  
more than just last week. For a moment I  
consider possible ways to respond.  
Should I point out that if he came to class  
more often he might know I'm not the type  
to pray, and, even if I was, I would  
be economical in my requests,  
so it's doubtful I would use one to try  
to land a student a role on a soap?  
But maybe he does know this. Maybe it's  
a dead-pan joke, an ironic put-on.  
After all, he is an actor. Perhaps  
I've failed to recognize a complex wit  
behind that beautiful B-movie face,  
but, no, even after years of training,  
he can't control his emotions, his awe  
at life's amazing opportunities,  
his excitement at all the adventures  
ahead. His sincerity and belief  
that I care as much as he does makes me  
feel old and irritable. I'm annoyed  
with him, with myself, with the way we keep  
swallowing those dangled hooks that always,  
no matter how they look, have the same bait:  
"You have been chosen because you're special."  
I want to warn him not to bite too hard,  
to say the best that I can hope for him  
is a director, a boss, a lover  
who practices catch and release; instead  
I hold up crossed fingers, that secular  
equivalent of prayer, and say, "Good luck.  
Let me know how it turns out. And please try  
to get me your work as soon as you can."