

▶ TWO POETS IN ONE MONTH! MATTHEW OLZMANN AND TAMAR YOSELOFF ... 1

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English Department

SUNY Fredonia

Jack Saxby, editor

Mezzanines and more with Matthew Olzmann

Fredonia's Fall Visiting Writers Series successfully kicked off this September as the poet Matthew Olzmann enraptured students and faculty alike with poetry that was at once hilariously absurd and invariably human. Absurdity doesn't come as much of a surprise from Olzmann -- just take a look at the table of contents of his debut collection of poetry, *Mezzanines*, where titles like "Bigfoot and the Placebo Effect," "Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised as a Love Poem," and "Man Robs Liquor Store, Leaves Résumé" permeate the entire collection; however, read a single one of these poems and it's apparent just how effectively Olzmann uses absurd-

ity to expose a greater understanding of what it means to be human, often ending initially ridiculous concepts on notes of sober reflection.

Olzmann began part one of two discussions, his craft talk, with a focus on the subject of absurdity, particularly the relationship between absurdity and belief. He started his practiced lecture with an anecdote that unsurprisingly matched the tonal focus of most of his poems, that of sarcasm, as he recounted a time when he and his brother, a molecular biologist at Berkeley, were watching the movie *Spider-man*. In this recapitulation, he explained how his brother was aghast at the movie's depiction of these

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Capturing the Disappearing London with Tamar Yoseloff

Tamar Yoseloff captivated Fredonia on September 16th with her distinctive perspective on poetry: a passion for examining the relationship between poetry and visual art. Many of her projects have included collaborations with artists such as Linda Karshan and Galerie Hein Elferin, as seen in her books *Fetch* and *Desire Paths*, respectively; and have also demonstrated her fondness for personifying artists like Jackson Pollock, as realized in her collection *The City with Horns*, featuring poems inspired by Pol-

lock's life and lifeworks. Most recently, Yoseloff has collaborated with graphic artist, Vici MacDonald, to memorialize the disappearing sections of London in her multimedia project, *Formerly*. This booklet consists of fourteen sonnets by Yoseloff and is accompanied by MacDonald's riveting photography, and it served as the central focus of Yoseloff's reading and discussion here at Fredonia.

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Tamar Yoseloff continued (from page 1)

Tamar Yoseloff was born in the US but moved to London in 1987 where she has lived ever since. Interestingly, her accent is difficult to place: it has both hints of sounding British and American, though, at this point, she has lived in London longer than she had in America. In fact, this fascination was brought up among many students, as much of her audience asked her how she had ended up in London or if she had any American mentalities and mannerisms that clashed with those more common in London, especially since those asking were about the same age that Yoseloff would have been in 1987. This



(Picture courtesy of tamaryoseloff.com)

sense of simultaneous belonging was further iterated when she started out with readings from *The City with Horns*, delving into poems of very American personas like that of Pollack in New York City or Pollack's infamous mistress; then proceeded to read from *Formerly* where she captured spots of London that were disappearing. These spots are, as Yoseloff described them, very representative areas of London in that they do not entail the widely known landmarks -- they are pubs and shop fronts and disheveled buildings with parts of their signs missing. Yoseloff's intimacy with London is hugely apparent, and her British side is definitely the more dominant of the two, but one can't help but see her not being completely British. A recent entry in her blog even indicates, after visiting Fredonia, that "London is my home now, but there is something that continues to draw me to my birth country, especially now that the ties I have to it are increasingly diminishing" (check out more at <http://tamaryoseloff.com/>). One can't help but wonder that as she captures the disappearing bits of London she supplants them on to herself and reduces her American aspects bit by bit.

Of course, these weren't the only matters that Yoseloff had discussed. Before her reading in the evening, Yoseloff had visited Sarah Gerkenmeyer's Form and Theory of Writing class to give a brief craft talk -- with excellent timing, too, as the particular class had been dis-

cussing sonnets and, in some cases, had grown frustrated with the constraints of the form. Yoseloff demonstrated how she had contemporized the old form in *Formerly* by adapting it to the urban environment she observed. As the preface of *Formerly* explains, "The sonnet is the classic elegiac form, but Yoseloff's are irregular, anarchic; the perfect companions for MacDonald's grainy photographs." Her vision for her fourteen sonnets was apparent during her evening reading, too. Many could see that not only was Yoseloff maintaining a more contemporary form, but that she truly respected the relationship between poetry and visual art, when she explained that she had refrained from visiting the actual sites of the selected photos that were in *Formerly* until she had written and completed every sonnet. This way the content could be formed entirely from the single moment captured by the picture, and not in any way influenced by the associations that naturally come from physically being somewhere. It also seemed appropriate to see that she had concluded her brief glimpses of a waning London world with a sonnet called "Formerly," that consisted of lines from each of the preceding sonnets in the booklet.

To see some of the pictures and locations of these snapshots of London life, and to see more of Yoseloff's unique adherence to her craft, check out her [Formerly website](#).

— by Jack Saxby

English Works Seeks New Members!

The English Works club is seeking more members for the development of the club! English Works is for students that are already English majors or interested in becoming one. The club is intended to show students that they can achieve their dream career after graduation, whether or not they're into publishing, academia, interested in graduate school, or something else entirely. Even if students don't have a clear idea on which direction they want to take their English degree, English Works exposes career paths that might not even have been considered.

Though it is a new group, English Works successfully launched a career panel last Spring that consisted of professors, editors, journalists, and other technical writers, demonstrating for students how effective an

English degree can be with its provision of marketable assets such as improved writing abilities. Also, during this event many students had learned of and secured a variety of internship opportunities that have and will provide valuable experience for their futures following graduation.

Students who have a passion for writing or reading often don't know how to turn their passion into a practical career. English Works, among other programs that the English Department facilitates, can help provide answers to these issues and demonstrate that it's not as much of an issue as one would think. Already, English Works members have planned a number of events, including a possible internship fair next spring semester, but they're always looking for

ideas. These events can only work with the support of the students and the professors of the English department, so any students are urged to become involved with English Works, to help ensure the club's longevity, to become an integral part of the club, and to find greater access to internships and the experiences of the faculty. If you are interested in joining, please email Katharine Carney at carn1388@fredonia.edu.

— by Katharine Carney

Dates to Remember:

- Sigma Tau Delta, every other Monday at 6pm in the Fenton Reading Room
- Writer's Ring, every Wednesday at 6pm in the Fenton Reading Room
- Caitlin Horrocks, fiction writer, Nov. 7

Writer's Ring Wants You

As the Fall 2013 semester begins, so begins another chance to visit the SUNY Fredonia Writer's Ring.

Sponsoring a weekly creative writing workshop, Writer's Ring seeks to provide a stable, respectful, and constructive environment for creative writers, regardless of the medium. Students are encouraged to share original works of fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and essays with one another while offering and receiving constructive feedback on their work, as well as the work of others. Both new and experienced writers are welcome to share their work, as well as participate in monthly writing prompts to hone their skills and stretch their creativity.

Writer's Ring also offers exciting opportunities to those who would like to see world-famous poets perform

their craft live. Last year, Writer's Ring co-sponsored poets Buddy Wakefield and Shanny Maney to perform live on campus, offering students a chance to learn from titans of the poetry world. These presentations are free for students and faculty alike, with more planned for the Spring semester.

Writer's Ring meets weekly on Wednesdays at 6p.m. in the Fenton Reading Room (unless noted otherwise,) and encourages any writer to join. For further questions, contact Peter Mason at maso1974@fredonia.edu, or Thomas Dean at dean5604@fredonia.edu

— by Thomas Dean

A Poem from Olzmann's *Mezzanines*

Art of the Mime:
An Educational Camp for Children

This seems like such a bad idea, it can't possibly be real, but there it is with a flyer promising *Intensive craft workshops by today's top practitioners.*

Imagine: rows of sad little children, all locked in sad little boxes of silence, all pressing their sad little hands against glass that does not exist. I mean, there must have been other options for these parents who obviously hate their kids. Perhaps catapults? An opening in the circus? Or just old-fashioned chores until they pass out from exhaustion? Nothing like sleep to silence a howling kid. And believe me, as a boy I howled until my own parents longed for ways to shut me the hell up. *Why don't you go practice your mime routine? they could've said.* I filled the world with so much noise, they needed earplugs to pray. I threw tantrums like canisters of tear gas, put my complaints in a cannon and shot out the roof of our house. Even now, I am a sound that does not stop. I say *I can't, I need, I want, and Is there a God and Yes there is and It's Me Me Me*, until, like the mime, I too am trapped in a box that can't be seen. I too have a hand that pushes against a wall, that searches for a seam.

Get involved with Sigma Tau Delta

Sigma Tau Delta, the English International Honors Society, is eagerly preparing for another exciting year at Fredonia.

Gretchen Roesch, Chapter President, said "We are working on several new events and we are excited for a fresh start this semester. We recognize that often English majors don't get the chance to know each other outside of the classroom. We would like to provide these opportunities where we can all discuss our love of literature together in fun and creative ways."

Many of these discussions take place in the English reading room as Coffee Talks, informal dialogues between the faculty and students about a variety of different topics: advice for graduate school, debates on children's literature, the shared experiences of professors, and many more.

The latest Coffee Talk, the first one of Fall semester, took place on September 27th in the English Reading Room. As it was Banned Books Week students and faculty, including Dr. Emily VanDette and Dr.

Heather McEntarfer, were asked to bring commonly banned books to the meeting to be read aloud in an effort to celebrate the freedom to read. The group examined topics that considered the reasons people ban books and the differences between banning and censorship, focusing on novels such as *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, and *Annie on my Mind* by Nancy Garden.

And Coffee Talks aren't the only events that Sigma Tau Delta facilitates: the group enjoys running a Short Stories Series at the WCA Home where English students volunteer to read to the elderly; and in the spring, the department faculty and students read bedtime stories to children of the local community -- complete with "onesies" and footed pajamas.

Sigma Tau Delta intends to organize these same events again, among others,

but the group is, by no means, opposed to welcoming new ideas. Applications aren't due until Spring, but if you're an English major or an English Education major considering joining the group, you're encouraged to attend any of the meetings you can make (every other Monday evening at 6pm in the Fenton English Reading Room). Even if you don't have any ideas for future events, come participate in the group's discussions anyway!

For further questions, contact Gretchen Roesch at roes8863@fredonia.edu. Also, stay up to date with Sigma Tau Delta's activities [on their new Facebook page](#).

— Jack Saxby



SIGMA TAU DELTA
INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY

Matthew Olzmann continued (from page 1)

genetically-modified spiders, how his brother explained the numerous impossibilities, and yet had no discrepancies with a man in tights swinging from webs battling a villain named the Green Goblin. Olzmann went on to say, "Belief is a tricky thing. We're willing to believe in some things, but not others. And what we're willing to believe, or at least to accept or go along with, doesn't always correspond to what is logical, rational, true, or possible."

With this irrationality in mind, Olzmann subscribes himself to the notion that the tendency when observing art is not so much *suspension* of disbelief as it is a *construction* of disbelief, as he said that "We turn to art, in part, wanting to escape. We want to believe; we willingly allow ourselves to do so until we choose not to. There is no initial disbelief to suspend." Olzmann believes that all poems are somewhat autobiographical, but he also prefers to write about things that he does not know. He values spontaneity in the process of art, using theatrical improv as an example of how im-

"what we're willing to believe ... doesn't always correspond to what is logical..."

portant it is to maintain the performance even when something unexpected or strange is introduced, otherwise there is risk of failure. It seems that, for Olzmann, absurdity and his postulations of the unknown provide him with the gateway through which he can acquire a sense of comfort in a world -- in a universe (many poems are fascinated by the immensity of space) -- of unanswerable questions.

As for the reading component of his visitation, his recitations were expectedly deadpan as his dry-witted humor was prevalent on the pages, perhaps with greater change in intonation as dramatically necessary for an audience-filled lecture hall. Olzmann designated poems from *Mezzanines*, ones that many students had at some point read, to about half of the reading, and new poems that were not in his collection, fresh to all listeners, to the other half.

To reassure that his growing mastery in the use of absurdity was no fluke with *Mezzanines*, Olzmann's newer poems had the hall

in laughter at the thought of him naming dinosaur fossils how he pleased and then in solemn quiet when a poem addressed a non-existent child in frustration at being unable to ever meet them.

If the strength of his ability to manipulate the spectrum of humor and seriousness, as reiterated by his newer poems, is any indication; or perhaps the distinct absence of disappointed students that had feverishly read his collection in preparation for his visit; or maybe the distinct presence of those who had not read his book, quickly purchasing a collection before he had finished signing; then it might be worthwhile to keep an eye out for his sophomore effort, as it's sure to be just as much of a powerhouse as *Mezzanines*.

— by Jack Saxby

"We turn to art, in part, wanting to escape. We want to believe ... until we choose not to."

Contact us!

The English Department Newsletter is designed to inform both undergraduate and graduate students, the English Department faculty, and the English alumni alike. If you have any comments regarding this month's issue, if you're interested in writing an article for us in the future, if you're faculty and think that something needs to be spotlighted, or if you're an Alumnus with experience that might prove insightful for students, please contact us today!

Jack Saxby, Editor
E-mail: jsaxby@fredonia.edu
Phone: (585) 754-1300

Dustin Parsons, Faculty Advisor
E-mail: dustin.parsons@fredonia.edu