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Jack Saxby, editor

Preserving the Ancients with Oscar Kenshur

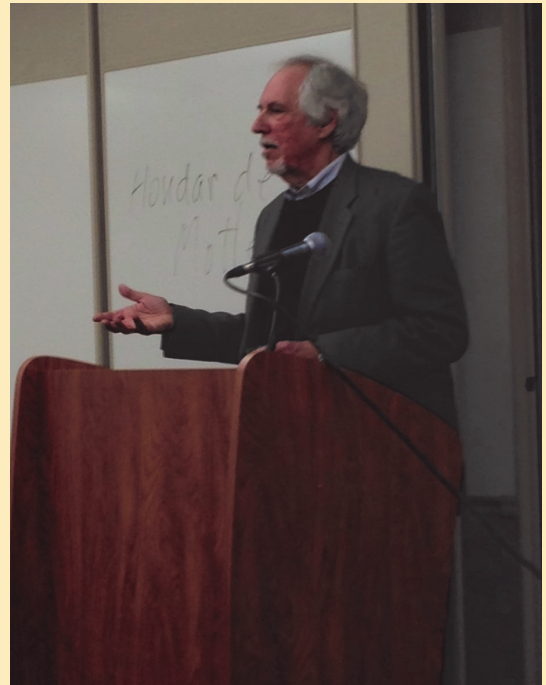
Oscar Kenshur, a professor and ex-chair of the comparative literature department at Indiana University, visited Fredonia on October 28th as part of the annual Mary Louise White lecture series. He has written two books and published numerous articles in prominent collections and academic journals. His expertise thrives in the 18th century with many of his projects researching the “ways in which writers use an interplay of rhetorical and logical strategies to try to reconcile their intellectual and ideological commitments” ([Indiana University's Website](#)).

While investigating how certain ethical issues of the 17th century gave rise to the aesthetics of the 18th century, Kenshur found himself particu-

larly interested in the essay, “The Standard of Taste,” by David Hume. This particular interest provided Kenshur with the focus of his lecture: the relevancy of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, and how during that quarrel (centered in the 17th century) the Ancients were more modern than the Moderns in many ways

Kenshur made sure to differentiate that the factions in question were not themselves the ancients (Homer, Aristotle, Ovid) and the moderns (Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, William Harvey) but the scholars that advocated either the ancients or the moderns, respectively -- they subscribed themselves to parties of a sort.

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English Works begins its bi-annual series of Casual Career Talks

On October 4th, the English Works club hosted a Casual Career Talk in the William Center. The club invited professors Dustin Parsons, Ann Siegle-Drege, and Theodore Steinberg to give students the opportunity to ask the panelists questions about their careers. After the professors introduced themselves it was apparent from the backgrounds they had provided that they had all taken very different career and educational paths to the positions they hold today.

Among a recapitulation of his experiences as a writer, Professor Parsons noted that in his youth he had aspired to claim the graveyard shift at a Seven-Eleven for minimum wage in hopes of finding more time to write. Dr. Stein-

berg, on the other hand, stated that he had never left the educational career field for more than a semester. As an expert in Medieval Literature, he has attended many conferences and authored books on the matter. Dr. Siegle-Drege shared with the audience that her experiences have always pertained to the field of education. She went on to explain the differences between teaching at the high school level and teaching at the college level, and how the high school level had shaped her teaching skills and readied her for the college one.

Parsons advised students considering future publication that “it’s much better to get rejected than to give up,” and he added that

“English majors have the best gig” because they are versatile within a multitude of options. Steinberg suggested that students should “find something you really like to do, because you’re going to be doing it for a long time.”

Overall, the event went well for the fledgling club. English Works intends on making the Casual Career Talk a bi-annual event with a new line-up of professors for each semester. Contact Katharine Carney at cam1388@fredonia.edu if you have any questions or interests regarding English Works

By Katharine Carney

The English Department Welcomes Its Newest Member

An interview between the editor and Dr. Heather McEntarfer

University at Pittsburg, M.F.A.
University at Buffalo, Ph.D. in
English Education.

What kind of classes do you teach?

Primarily, I've been hired as an English Education professor. I have been teaching Adolescent Literature, Literacy and Technology, and some Readings courses for English Ed. I've also taught some classes in creative writing and in technical writing, such as Creative Nonfiction, Introduction to Creative Writing, and Writing in a Digital World (which I'm teaching this semester). Writing and teaching have always been my two greatest passions.

Is teaching at Fredonia your first time in a teaching environment?

Not at all, I've done student teaching in high schools and in middle schools in a variety of ways and workshops. Actually, I've taught at Pitt, at Niagara University, and at U.B. Each time I was in school, I was teaching, and then afterwards I had taught at Niagara.

What is one of your more memorable experiences here at Fredonia?

Oh, that's a good one! I'm thinking two things, and I'll probably think of something the minute you leave. One is: watching students' videos with them in Literacy and Technology because many students have never made a video. They love writing, but making a video is this new form to them. They make these things that are amazing to me, amazing to them, and they're surprised at what they can make. I'd say that watching those unfold with students, and watching how proud each class was of what their classmates had made, is something that I've loved. And the other is when each student from my creative nonfiction class read their revised writings at the end of the semester. Students took either their personal essays or profile pieces or articles

of literary journalism, and they read an excerpt of their work to their class at a coffee shop one evening. That was really fun.

Speaking of creative nonfiction, do you have a favorite subject or any particular interests when it comes to your own writing?

In my manuscript, I wrote about educational equity and school desegregation. I went down to Wake County, North Carolina where there was this controversy involving desegregation. This was 2004 (you think of desegregation in the sixties), only here the semblance of segregation was socioeconomic rather than racial. Anyway, I spent time with families there and wrote about their experiences. From that endeavor I

learned a lot about myself and about writing, about education and about people. I also learned that I am more comfortable with personal essay and memoir writing than I am with literary journalism. It was a great challenge and a great experience, but now I think I write more about my family -- my immediate family and my grandparents. I think their lives and my own life are what I tend to explore most while writing creative nonfiction.

Are you currently working on any projects or research?

Currently, I'm trying to get different sections of my dissertation published as a series of standalone articles. I taught a teacher education course that focused on gender and sexuality in schools, and I had my students doing narrative writing about these topics. Some of these articles look at how these writings helped them learn. Others examine how the students talked about transgender issues or how they talked about religion and

sexuality. So I'm working on writing about that course and how the students worked through the course when it came to those topics, primarily through their narrative writing.

As for my plans afterwards, I would love to continue studying how teachers educate students in matters like diversity. How do they talk about diversity? How do they discuss gender and sexuality? How do discussions of these subjects play out in their student teaching? I would also love to study how teachers bring in works against heteronormativity in schools. There are difficulties in some places with these changes, often political difficulties. How do teachers actually find ways to bring in books with LGBTQ char-



acters? I'm interested in pursuing those matters. I want to get back to creative nonfiction, too. I find it isn't always that easy to do both academic writing and creative nonfiction at the same time, probably because the head is going in two different directions.

Was there ever a definitive point where you found your passion for writing creative nonfiction, in addition to your passion for teaching?

Senior year of college, I took a creative writing class with a professor I really liked and she was the one who asked if I had "ever thought about an MFA program?" I was in the last year of English Ed. I thought, for sure, that I was going to go out and get a teaching job the next year. But when she said that, I totally opened up. I had been sort of involved with writing in college, but I had never considered that it was a career possibility. So with my teacher's motivation, I began applying -- way too late, I might add. I began looking

at schools in November of my senior year, which you're not supposed to do. It was a terrible terrible winter. I remember one day, when I had to do these applications, all three of the computers at home weren't working. It was Christmas break and not one was working. So I had to make my way to Buffalo to get one of the computers fixed, but there was a crazy snow storm. After I had shoveled off three cars in our driveway, my mother came out and told me that the thruway was closed. It was not a good day. Fortunately, I got all my applications in, and I got into Pitt. Anyway, my identity at that point had been that I am someone who likes to write more than someone that is a writer. Finishing an MFA helped solidify my identity as a writer.

Aside from starting searches as early as possible to avoid long winters, do you have any other advice for those that might want to begin a career in the world of creative writing?

Definitely talk to the professors here because there are a range of ways to go about it. There are good reasons to go into an MFA program. It's an amazing, but rare, opportunity to spend three years in a community of writers, devoted to your own writing and to the writing of others, everyone hoping to see each other grow as a writer. It is difficult though. If you're going into an MFA program to get a job teaching at a college you can obviously do that -- there are people who have done that here -- but you need to be aware that it is not an easy route. You have to have an MFA, usually an MFA and a book, which is a difficult thing to do right out of a program. That's not to discourage anyone from doing it, only to say that you need to know what your goals are, what the challenges are, what the advantages are. But know that writing for a career is hugely rewarding. If it is passion that you have, there are people here that share that passion and that can help you make a life out of it.

Advantages of an American Studies background

A brief interview between the editor and Dr. Shannon McRae

What kind of knowledge does the American Studies program provide?

American Studies is one of the programs within Fredonia's Interdisciplinary Studies Division (INDS). The strength of the program, which offers both a major and a minor, is that it enables students to approach complex issues--American history, politics, culture, the environment, from a variety of perspectives, in order to achieve a more complete picture than might be possible within the confines of a single discipline. This multi-perspective approach has been a component of higher education for a long time; the American Studies program at Yale, for example, has been around for 60 years.

How might the program prove beneficial for an English major?

It's easy to minor in American studies,

especially for English majors as most of the core courses are also English courses. The major, which is somewhat more extensive, offers the same core plus a choice of one of several tracks in American popular culture: American Identities and Cultures, Popular and Visual Culture, Environment and Place, and Democracy and Civic Engagement. A double major in American Studies and English is excellent preparation for fields such as law, environmental or political work, community work, public relations and marketing, foreign service, museum work, and the entertainment industry. It's also an excellent preparation for our Education majors because the interdisciplinary approach bears some similarity to the new Common Core structure. Because most of these tracks require an internship or other field experience, it potentially offers a direct line to future job opportunities, which many of our majors have obtained.

We're also happy to tailor the program to suit a student's specific interests, if they don't happen to fall within one of our current tracks. One of our majors, for example, has designed an American music cultures track to complement his studies in Ethno-musicology through the School of Music. Another major devised a focus on American Culture and Museum Studies.

Have any changes been made to the program?

We're currently in the process of redesigning the major, in response to the current needs of our students, the availability of courses, and Fredonia's changing educational mission to reflect current best practices.

Dr. McRae urges anyone interested in discussing a major or minor in American Studies to come by her office, especially if you're an English major or an English Ed. Major!

Fredonia Alumni create Online Literary Publication

Jordan Rizzieri and Bee Walsh, two Fredonia graduates, have created their own online literary magazine, *The Rain, Party, & Disaster Society*.

Since graduating from SUNY Fredonia with a B.A. in Theatre Arts and a minor in English, Jordan Rizzieri, 26, has spent a great deal of her as a playwright. Her first full-length play, *The Reunion Cycle*, was produced as part of the Buffalo Infringement Festival. After publishing an essay and blogging extensively about her experiences caring for her ailing mother, she soon determined that serving as editor-in-chief for her own literary magazine was more suited to her tastes.

Bee Walsh, 24, graduated from Fredonia in 2010 with a B.A. in English Literature and a B.S. in International Peace and Conflict Resolution. Walsh serves as the poetry editor for their new magazine, a role in which she has some experience with as she also served, for a time, as the poetry editor of Fredonia's literary magazine, *The Trident*.

Together with a couple of others on their editorial staff, they've established their online liter-

ary magazine. As their website puts it, "*The Rain, Party, & Disaster Society* is an online literary publication with the purpose of giving a voice to individuals who wish to raise questions about our society, our culture, and our lives. Contributors to the magazine will be comprised of writers, artists and photographers of all walks of life. The RP&D Society serves to represent the unpopular opinion, the unspoken idea, or the incendiary subject. The works our readers find here are meant to excite, infuriate and challenge them."

If this style of writing intrigues you, Walsh and Rizzieri implore you to check out their site and see if your interests pertain to the magazine's ambitions, possibly even submit to the magazine as their first reading period is open from the time of this newsletter's publication through November 22nd, 2013. Contact information is on their site at <http://rpd-society.com/>

— Jack Saxby

Dates to Remember:

- Caitlin Horrocks, fiction writer, Nov. 7
- 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
- Sigma Tau Delta Coffee Talk at 4pm on November 20th, in the English Reading Room

Oscar Kenshur continued (from page 1)

Kenshur notes that many people assume the party of the moderns to be representative of revolutionary development. After all, it was the scientific revolution of the 17th century -- Harvey had determined that blood circulated the human body, Bacon had developed an inductive method for philosophy and science. It wouldn't be unreasonable to think that the modern writers of this time were going to continue to "break the mold" and accomplish things that the ancient world would never have achieved. The party of the moderns had the advantage of reliability, and during the Quarrel they would appeal to this reliability when determining the works of ancient writers as being inferior.

To counter the Modern's appeal to reason, the party of the ancients appealed to experience and to consensus, to human sensation and emotion. The works of Homer had pleased Athens and Rome thousands of years ago, and it pleased Paris and London in the days of the 17th century. There was -- and still is -- consensus that Homer is greatly appreciated, that there is experience in his poetry having endured ages.

Eventually, members of both the party of the ancients and the party of the moderns accused one another of being prejudiced toward the opposing era in favor of their preferred writers. Kenshur noted that some of his work has examined the tendency for people to imitate the ideas of their enemies by taking whatever their enemies say and turning it against them. So how might one discern the attitudes of each side and come to an appropriate conclusion in the Quarrel? Kenshur offers that one must establish their place in history or their attitude toward history. To do this, one must become a historicist -- Kenshur is quite proficient with this particular lens of criticism -- and examine each era (its social customs, its philosophies, its literature, etc.)

with an appropriate historical and cultural context.

The quality of Homer's writings (Kenshur's discussion pertained to many writers of antiquity, but he focused on Homer for the lecture because so much controversy centered on the debates over the Homeric age) was fought between the Ancients and the Moderns on the grounds of literary taste, morality, and decorum. These were the three faults that surrounded Homer's work, mainly attacked by the Moderns, but also conceded slightly by the Ancients in the defense of their favored era.

From the party of the Moderns, people like Charles Perrault, wrote that Homer's work is full of moral faults because he lived in a "barbaric age." Perrault argues, if Homer's poetry had been written in the modern age, his poetry would have been "less blighted." Additionally, Perrault exploited modern literary tastes, in that Homer's poetry didn't adhere to neo-classicism (for instance, Homer's tendency to stop in the middle of a battle and discuss the ancestry of warriors defied the literary taste of the 17th century). Furthermore, and what Kenshur was most interested in, the 17th century Moderns were aghast at the violations in decorum; namely, the servile actions of Homeric nobility. It was abhorrent for royalty to do anything in the nature of tending the flock or fetching water from the creek -- those were the obligations of servants!

Some members of the party of the ancients conceded that it was a barbaric age, like Longepierre; other members deemed the era not barbaric but simple in its nobility, like Anne Dacier who felt the 17th century as overly decadent; but all defenders of the ancients claimed it was not the fault of the Homer for living in his era, and that it was narrow-minded to hold it against him. As for questioning the morality of

Madame Dacier's preferred era, she adopted a view that the Homeric age was no less moral than the 17th century, admitting that the ancient era was cruel and full of revenge and concubinage, but reinforcing that this was not all that different from patriarchs and the behavior of people in a Christian world. As for countering Moderns on the grounds of decorum, Ancients argued that decorum had changed over the years, and that it would continue to change. As Kenshur puts it, "if one condemns Homer based on the propriety of their own period, they are opening oneself to condemnation by a future era because notions of decorum change."

Kenshur argues that the moderns did not break the mold. They did not uphold this notion of revolutionary development, assumed and generalized as the notion might be. Kenshur asserts that they didn't stand for new genres and new directions, instead vulgarizing ancient texts as epitomized by one such imitation of Homer's *The Iliad* with its promised excision of Homer's defects. He acknowledges that this may have been a byproduct of the exceptionalism in France during the reign of Louis XIV, where citizens considered their era the apex of civilization, and thusly dismissed any prior era, including the Homeric age, as "before the apex" or inferior. Regardless, according to Kenshur, the party of the moderns dedicated more of their time to discerning faults of the past and discussing how they avoided them, rather than pursuing new ideas and discoveries. Kenshur reasserts how effective and practical historicism is when engaging the customs and culture of a previous age; it's narrow-minded to think that universal notions apply to every time and place, and a future generation will scrutinize the era with that mentality as having had that fault.

By Jack Saxby

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!

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In Sigma Tau Delta's October Coffee Talk students discussed Queer Literature with Professors McEntarfer, Iovannone, and McRae. They talked about the evolution of queer literature while discussing books such as *Middlesex*, *Parrotfish*, and *Luna*.



Join Sigma Tau Delta in their next Coffee Talk at 4pm on Nov. 20th in the English Reading Room