

# ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

Tomi Stratton,  
Editor

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## VISITING WRITER – JIM DANIELS

By Travis Perry

When Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz visited Fredonia earlier this semester, she mentioned that one of her inspirations for becoming a poet was a poet and fiction writer named Jim Daniels. How fortunate were we, then, to have our second speaker for the Visiting Writers Program be the inspiration for our first?

At Jim Daniels' craft talk, the poet and fiction writer stood up in front of a packed English Reading Room and talked about his experiences as a writer. Daniels is unique from other visiting speakers so far in that he has experience with screenwriting, in addition to poetry and fiction. In fact, the focus of his craft talk was the adaptation of one of his short stories, Mr. Pleasant, and discussed some of his experiences during the making of the film. Writing for a collaboration was touched upon, as Daniels talked about creative differences with the director and crew of the film, citing instances where he changed the story or dialogue to better suit the film. The writer's

role, he said, changes in film. When it's a story that one person is writing, they ultimately have total control over what happens. This isn't the case in the making of films, as there are more creative voices in the process to change the end result.

The beginning of the change, Daniels said when talking about adapting stories into screenplays, is to remove everything but dialogue because of the way movies work. We don't get to hear the characters' thoughts in movies the way we would in short stories (except for the occasional voice over narration), so how do you externalize the internal? What it comes down to is the collaborative effort between writers, directors and actors to do with looks what dialogue can't necessarily do.

For writers finding their writing falling into a lull, Daniels offered one key piece of advice: try to step out of the comfort

zone. Try fiction writing, poetry, screen writing, picture writing, any kind of writing to change it up and give yourself a new outlet to make creative choices. You might surprise yourself in the end.

Later in the evening, Daniels read the short story "Candy Necklace" about a teenaged girl named Shelley trying to make due with her dysfunctional family. Shelley, like many Daniels characters, lives in Detroit, along with her abusive and alcoholic mother, her reporter-like sister Tina, and her absent truck-driving and product-smuggling father. The story deals with Shelley's attempts to rationalize her life, right around the time she has to bring her mother to the hospital. There, she meets a nurse named Mike Torres, who has a tattoo of Jesus and Gandhi giving each other high-fives, who inadvertently shows her that people aren't all as screwed up as she has come to believe.

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## BROWN BAG SERIES

By Amanda Rogers

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, The Arts and Humanities Brown Bag Series had its second lecture, “Backchanneling: A Creative Experiment with Twitter and Facebook in *The Altruists*.” The presentation took place between 12 and 1 pm in Bartlett Theater, where the show *The Altruists* opened November 5<sup>th</sup>. Speaking in the lecture were Tom Loughlin, the director and chair of the department of Theatre and Dance; Eliza Muench, the assistant director; and there was also a demonstration done by members of the cast and

crew.

The theme of the lecture series, “Cultivating Creativity, Embracing Innovation,” found a very interesting study in the ideas behind the department of Theater and Dance’s production of *The Altruists*. The show took the often problematic use of cell phones and other mobile devices, and it utilized these devices in a creative and innovative way.

Backchanneling is the idea of having an electronic secondary conversation. Throughout the show it was possible to receive twitter

messages from the crew, explaining certain references throughout the show. Each of the characters also has their own Facebook account where they posted updates prior to the show. This “character study,” as Loughlin put it, was also a way to familiarize the audience with the characters.

Tom Loughlin explained that he didn’t know how the experiment would turn out. He said that this kind of communication will hopefully promote a participating, active experience for the audience. Loughlin explained that the idea of backchanneling is

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## WINTER WHEAT

By Tomi Stratton

On Friday, November 12th, seven students piled into one of the Fredonia vans to attend the Winter Wheat writing conference in Bowling Green, Ohio. Winter Wheat is put on by Mike Czyzniewski and Karen Craigo, editors of the Mid-American Review. After a four and a half hour car ride, the students arrived in time for readings by Gaylord



PHOTO BY MIKE CZYZNIEJEWSKI

Brewer and Lola Haskins. Right away the students were surprised. Haskins memorized her poems and recited them to the crowd by heart.

Sessions started early on Saturday, November 13<sup>th</sup>. The students could only choose four sessions to attend out more than thirty. These sessions included “Drawing the Line” in which the writers explored the choices

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not always a welcome idea, but he hoped that it would enhance the experience in the case of *The Altruists*. He explained that the crew certainly needs to be prepared to handle the ringing of cell phones and other such distractions. However, he said that it is “better to integrate it and make it a part of the experience” as opposed to banishing the use of technology and risking the alienation of audience

members.

Natalie Gerber, who is one of the organizers of the lecture series, made clear that one of the goals of the lecture series is to showcase what is happening on campus. The benefits of seeing what peers can do are numerous. One of the eventual goals of the series is to represent all of the disciplines of the campus and to showcase the talents at SUNY Fredonia.

“We want to create a sense of community around scholarship and creative works in the community,” Gerber said.

The last event in the series for Fall 2010 will take place on December 1<sup>st</sup> at noon in the Williams Center S104. After the show the lecture features “Brown Bag Desserts,” which is a chance to snack and to have conversation with the featured speaker(s).

## MASQUERADE OPEN MIC NIGHT

By Erin Taylor

Black cats turned out to be good luck for the students who donned masks and read their work at the Masquerade Open Mic Night on October 28<sup>th</sup>. Writers Ring and Sigma Tau Delta co-hosted the event which filled The Spot with students, faculty, and even a few parents. Poetry was the overwhelming form of choice with forms ranging from traditional, rhyming couplets, to free verse slam poetry. The topics of the pieces were

just as diverse, from a scorned lover in *Rosaline*, to child soldiers in the Sudan in *Rights*.



A cello, trumpet and tambourine also found their own unique place on stage, accompanying a poet as well as alone. This eclectic mix of student voices across disci-

plines is exactly what makes Open Mic Nights so successful. The goal of any good Open Mic Night is to give aspiring writers and musicians a place to enhance their craft and to expose it to a wider audience, and this event did just that. This is only the beginning of Open Mic Nights on campus, they will be held throughout the year so keep an eye out for the next one because we hope to add your voice to the mix!

## ANSWERS FROM APTOWICZ

By Tiffany Wood

Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz was a character to remember on the SUNY Fredonia Campus last September 30. The first of the two visiting writers in the Mary Louise White Visiting Writers Series this semester, Aptowicz made a great impression on the students—riling them up into hysterics and spontaneous shouting during her reading, and offering great, sobering advice for aspiring writers during her craft talk. For those of you who may have missed her visit, or just want to get inside her head a little more, here are her enlightening and, as always, hilarious answers to interview questions.

*You’ve been writing for a long time, starting in high school with the school’s literary magazine and paper. How did you know that that was what you wanted to do?*

It’s funny -- but I remember the exact moment I knew I wanted to be a writer. I was in the fourth grade, and we had to fill out a paper about what we had wanted to be when we grew up. The top half of the paper was a box for our self-drawn illustration of us doing our chosen career, and the bottom half was reserved for text. I wrote this extremely detailed & vivid (for a fourth grader) sermon about how I wanted to be a painter, and paint the scenes from nature, especially the sea. And I went on and on about the things I would paint: birds and beaches and sunsets. When that was done, I went to do the illustration, and it... sucked. It was embarrassingly bad. I realized then and there that I should likely stick with writing. When our teacher tacked up our papers on the wall, I waited until she was out of the room and ran up to mine, crossed out "PAINTER" and put "AUTHOR." And that was that.

*Do you ever feel especially vulnerable, with your poetry teeming with honesty and brazenness as it is? (ie: “At The Office Holiday Party”,*

*“A Short History of Unusual Fish”, the general display of your relationship with Shappy, etc.)*

That’s a fantastic question! I often use my poetry to get stuff out of my head so that I stop obsessing about it. "At The Office Holiday Party" being a perfect example of me just feeling terrible and writing the poem allowed me to stop thinking about it, because it was on the page now. When I did see that story on the page, I was surprised how my feelings for it changed -- that it became less humiliating, and more darkly funny; that I felt less crushed, and more empowered. The next steps for that poem (and all my poems) is that I read it outloud at the Bowery Poetry Club during the poetry slam series I run (NYC-Urbana), and I submitted the poem for publication consideration. Those two steps -- reading it to a community already familiar with me; submitting it to a lit journal that doesn't know me at all -- helps develop the poem in my mind, frees it, if that's the right word. By the time I get to putting together the manuscript, the work has already been out there on a number of different levels, so even if it feels vulnerable, it's okay.

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*How often do you write? How often do you end up liking what you write?*

I do something in the service of my writing every day, whether that means writing, submitting, performing, editing, etc... As I mentioned in Fredonia, when it comes to poetry, I have one big Word doc where I collect all my current poems (poems which haven't already been published in books), and I never delete. Every poem idea, every title (but no poem... yet), every snippet, every line, every terrible poem gets saved, because sometimes it will take you some time to understand why you were attracted to an idea, or a phrase, or angle, and if you don't save what you might consider to be a terrible poem, you might not get that insight. So I write a lot, and I may not consider it all great at the moment, I always have faith in its potential.

*What was it like becoming the youngest founding slammaster in the nation?*

It didn't feel weird in the moment, because in NYC everyone is always trying to do something. Starting up the NYC-Urbana Poetry Slam as a teenager didn't seem so weird in that context. But when I went to the first slammaster meeting, and I was the youngest person there by several decades, then it seemed weird!

*In your experience, what has been the greatest thing to come out of your poetry?*

Wow. That's a question I've never been asked before... and it's a toughie! But if I were to really think about it, I think that it would have to be the access

it has provided me to worlds that I might otherwise never have been exposed to. And I don't just mean touring, or being invited to perform at far off places, but I also mean hearing the story of another New Yorker who you might never have met had you not been in the same poetry venue on the same random night. I am grateful at the stories that have been shared with me, and I've been able to share my story too.

*What advice would you give to aspiring poets?*

Gosh, there is so much advice to give -- read as much as you can! Write as much as you can! Be fearless in getting your work out there! -- But if I had to boil it down to one big idea it's that be an advocate for what you LOVE about writing: that means reading books you love and then telling other people that you love them (friends, family, strangers!); writing poetry or stories that embodies what you want writing to be like, instead of griping about the writing that you think is sub-par; organizing readings for writers you love and forcing people to come to them & fall in love; encouraging your peers to get their work out there, and getting your own work out there too! I think the more you advocate for writers and projects you love, the more you will feel a part of the big family of writing, and that's what every writer wants, right?

For more information, visit [www.aptowicz.com](http://www.aptowicz.com).





# Sigma Tau Delta Column



**By Joseph Moynihan**

As the fall semester progresses Sigma Tau Delta, English Honors Society, prepares to host its last events for the fall season. Our prior events, including Coffee Talk, Meet the Uppers, WCA Outreach, and Masquerade Open Mic Night, were all well attended and immensely entertaining. Each event thus far this semester has strived to bring together the academic community in

a fun and meaningful way.

Sigma Tau Delta will also be hosting the *Sigma Tau Delta Mixer* on December 2 from 7-11 at the White Inn. Tickets will be sold prior to the event for \$5 and can be purchased by talking to any of the E-board or STD advisers. All proceeds of the event will go to the Dunn Memorial Scholarship. There will be raffles and opportunities to win unique prizes. All individuals in attendance must be twenty-one.

To all who have attended our events thus far this semester, thank you. With the support of the student body and faculty we have been able to create a community of peers who truly affect change in their environment. Thank you to everyone who has attended and volunteered this semester. Your continued work is inspiring. I implore everyone to come out to the upcoming events and experience what Sigma Tau Delta has to offer.

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they had with line breaks in poetry; “Exploring Hypnagogia,” in which writers attempt to write when they are just about to enter or exit from sleep; “Three Things: Building Fiction from Friction,” in which the writers drew three unrelated items to write about in one story; and “Getting in and Out of the Woods” which dealt with modernizations of classic fairy tales.

Professor Dustin Par-

sons also taught a session at Winter Wheat entitled “You and Me: Second Person Options in Fiction.” The session gave examples of second person as well as an exercise to help writers develop their own style in the underused point-of-view.

After the sessions, there was another reading by Andrew Ervin. This was followed by a pizza dinner and a giant cake for dinner. Then there was a reading by Re-

becca Meacham. Winter Wheat ended with an Open Mic Night. At first, nobody volunteered to go. However, after Professor Parsons got the train rolling, six of the seven SUNY Fredonia students read their works aloud as well.

On Sunday morning, after a great breakfast at Waffle House, the students settled back in the van for the car ride back home to SUNY Fredonia with a lot of great experiences in Ohio.

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After the reading came time for questions and answers, many of which give a great deal of insight about the author. When asked about his preference on whether the stories be read separately or as a whole, Daniels said that each story is its own thing, but they are all unified by similar themes or obsessions. He also does a lot of research for his stories, but pulls from his past as well. He said that some of his stories and poems are

90% fiction, while some are only 50% fiction. And when he has to decide between fiction and poetry, Daniels looks to dialogue and image. If it has a lot of potential for dialogue, chances are it'll become a short story, whereas poems are more focused on images. Sometimes, Daniels shared with the crowd in the Thompson lecture hall, he'll take one idea and write both if the mood suits him.

program was a great success this semester, with two instances of packed craft talks and readings from Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz and Jim Daniels. Next semester we have two more speakers coming to Fredonia to share their experience and advice: Aryn Kyle, author of *Boys and Girls Like You and Me*, and John Murillo, author of *Jump Up and Boogie*. Have a good winter break, and we'll see you soon!

The Visiting Writers

### December Graduates

Amelia Green	Chelsea Mink
Amanda Hebing	Sarah Nobel
Faith Jones	Erin O'Mara
Blane Kelly	Heather Personett
Jared Lincourt	Heather Williams
Josh Matecki	Lauren Williams

### Upcoming Events

- **Dead Week Begins** on December 6th.
- **Last Day of Class** before finals week is December 10th.
- **Finals Week** is December 13th through the 17th.

Attention Everybody!

I would like to thank everyone who wrote for, or donated pictures or their time to the newsletter this semester. It wouldn't be possible without the hard work and dedication from every student, faculty and staff member of the English Department. As well, I would like to give a special Thank You to Tom Gestwicki in the print shop for everything he has done for both the campus and the English Department. Enjoy your retirement from the print shop!

Tomi Stratton  
Editor

