

Dangerous writing, drag queens, and passionate love

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“
I am
taking
this
turkey.”

”
Woman
From “Invisible
Monsters”
by Chuck
Palahniuk

“Dangerous writing” was the theme for this term’s Author’s Night, and three local authors—Joanna Rose, Tom Spanbauer and Chuck Palahniuk, carried that theme well.

Rose, an organizer of Powell’s Book Store’s famous readings and event series, is also the author of a novel, *Little Miss Strange*, her first. Rose has written since she was a little girl; her first book was written “at age ten during arithmetic class,” she said.

Rose said, regarding the term “dangerous writers” and what it meant to her, “For me it is to put the reader on the page with the language.”

Rose, who has been published in the upstanding literary magazine *Story*, quoted a Barry Lopez line about the “sound of writing” and “the sound of listening” and that “the chance to read it [her story “Edge of the Kingdom”] to you all is exciting.” She called the piece a “work in progress” and began reading. The writing was powerful, the audience silent, as the story of a girl and her dog, an Irish Setter named Bullfrog, unfolded.

Rose read with intensity and at times it was like she took backstage and the story was telling itself to the audience. There was a philosophy regarding “optical delusions” over “illusions.” Rose read, “A delusion is your own,” and that illusions were something that someone else wanted you to see.

The girl in the story “likes what holds hope” and dreamily went on about how clouds hide things. Then came a clever transition: Looking at a sunrise, the pastel colors blending, reminds her of envelopes and suddenly the story carries the girl back into her home as she is sifting through letters in a drawer. The audience applauded her enthusiastically as Spanbauer took the podium.

Spanbauer immediately began reading, only briefly introducing the narrator of the story as a “western guy” and

that he was a lonely man. The other character, an African-American drag queen named Rose, was in the hospital with “a touch of the AIDS,” but it is never confirmed during Spanbauer’s reading that the character has AIDS.

Spanbauer’s imagery of the hospital was very haunting. Walking down the corridor, he explained the people in the rooms as “skeltons” in a bed that is swallowing them up.

Rose had a room alone and most of the reading took place in this hospital room. During the reading, Spanbauer’s character shared the experiences he had while watching over his friend Rose. From peaceful, quiet moments during episodes of the Oprah Winfrey show, to a naked man jumping out of the window, many events kept the listeners entertained.

At the end of the reading, Rose was well again and was discharged from the hospital. The audience, to Spanbauer’s delight, really felt something for his character.

Palahniuk, 1997 Oregon Book Award recipient for his book *Fight Club*, read to the audience from his new book, *Survivor*, to be released next January.

The story started with a man trying to bread veil cutlets when he receives a phone call from a distressed young lady in a night club. She wants to end it all. The man tells her to kill herself. The man also thought his goldfish too active and dropped a Valium into its tank. The character portrayed by Palahniuk was strong and harsh.

It isn’t revealed until later in the story

that the man’s phone number was accidentally printed in a “crisis help line” ad in the newspaper and that this man is literally “playing God.”

Palahniuk also shared a scene from a “book no one will publish.” *Invisible Monsters* was the name of the book and the reason no one would publish it was beyond the audience’s comprehension.

The story was told in first person, Palahniuk reading from a woman’s point of view. This woman was in an accident and her face was scarred. Very powerfully portrayed, the woman goes into a grocery store, where everyone ignores her, and steals a turkey. The only one who protests, even after she shouts that “I am taking this turkey,” is a little boy who says that there is “a monster stealing food.”

It was a privilege to hear a reading from a book no one will see on the shelves.

One audience member asked why each of the three stories was written in the first person.

“First person gets the reader closer to the story,” said Rose. “Third person keeps the reader separate from the

page.”

Spanbauer explained that in first person “you can say anything.” In first person, he went on, the world looks as it does because of the character’s personality. In third person, the reader and the writer is an outside entity, going inside and outside the story.

When asked about what “dangerous writing” meant to them, Palahniuk answered, saying that writing was to “do something for you” and to “have a great time at it.”

Palahniuk shared a scene from *Fight Club* where the two characters make passionate love for ten hours. He explained that he had to think of the most beautiful line for her to say to him, and that of course should be, “I want to have your baby.” But this isn’t good enough for Palahniuk. He replaces it with the line, “I want to have your abortion.” According to him, they have decided to keep the line for the movie, which will star Brad Pitt and Courtney Love.

When the discussion was over, the audience gave a final round of applause. The three writers had eloquently formed a relationship between the reader and the written language.



From left: authors Chuck Palahniuk, Tom Spanbauer and Joanna Rose were showcased in this term’s Authors’ Night.

TIMOTHY BELL / Clackamas Print

Native American's poetry rages at injustice

MIKE GARCIA
Copy Editor

The newly-resurrected Gregory Forum will host a free reading by one of the 90s’ most distinctive poets—the artist presently known as Chrystos.

She is this year’s writer in residence at Clackamas and will read Thursday, May 7, at 7:00 p.m.

As the winner of the Audre Lorde International Poetry Competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award in 1995, Chrystos has established herself as a prominent Native American poet.

Chrystos, a resident of Washington, has had five volumes of poetry published and has been included in three anthologies.

She was born in the baby boomer age to a Native American-descended father and a European mother. But a quick browsing of her poetry will reinforce her claim that she is not a spokesperson for Native American issues.

“Chrystos’ work has been described as ‘unflinchingly violent’ in its theme and style,” according to a press release from English Instructor Kate Gray. “Much like Audre Lorde, she tries to break the language that has been used like tools to keep the master’s house standing.

“She challenges conventions of grammar and typography just as she challenges the forces which have oppressed Native Americans, women, homosexuals, and others,” Gray continues.

“Her poetry both rages at injustice and brutality and sings the sweetness of love. Often her poems reveal the deep connection she feels between her body and those of the people who have suffered brutal colonization.”



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A self-described “Urban Indian,” poet Chrystos.

The Clackamas Community College Foundation has supported the Writer-in-Residence program for six years. Additional supporters include Coyote Circle and the English department.

The program has always included nationally-recognized poets, fiction writers and playwrights, and has featured workshops in which aspiring writers get pointers from someone who has sampled the sweet taste of success. This year is no exception: a poetry workshop will take place Friday, May 8, in M204. Ten students will work with her on their poems. The time has not yet been set.

Chrystos will lead a discussion on the ethics of writing at noon the same day. For more information about any of these events, call Gray at ext. 2371.

I Walk in the History of My People

*In the scars of my knees you can see
children torn from their families
bludgeoned into government schools
You can see through the pins in my bones
that we are prisoners of a long war
My knee is so badly no one will look at it
The pus of the past oozes from every pore
This infection has gone on for at least 300 years
Our sacred beliefs have been made into pencils
names of cities gas stations
My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly
Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it
My knee is wounded*

See

How I Am Still Walking