



Jeff Knorr



Craig Lesley



Tim Schell

Knorr, Lesley and Schell share literary insights

Craig Lesley, Tim Schell and Jeff Knorr, Clackamas English instructors, talk to Willamette students about the experience of assembling a literary journal.

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Contributing Writer

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Getting a story published in a literary journal is "like a first kiss," author Craig Lesley said last month to his Willamette University students and friends. "You never forget the sheer joy of hearing someone say, 'We're going to publish your work.'"

With these encouraging words, Lesley introduced Clackamas English instructors Tim Schell and Jeff Knorr and their "labor of love," the nationally distributed *Clackamas Literary Review*. Schell and Knorr were at Willamette to talk about the experience of assembling a literary journal twice a year.

"Small literary journals are a great way to 'break in' to the creative writing scene," Lesley said. For example, one Houghton Mifflin editor once read a story called "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa" in a small Canadian journal and contacted author W.P. Kinsella to expand it into a novel. The novel was so successful that it was made into a movie, *Field of Dreams*.

Prominent editors read the CLR as well, Lesley pointed out. A Stephen Dobyns story published in the journal was selected by Amy Tan to appear in this year's edition of the Best American Short Stories anthology.

Schell and Knorr took some time to read excerpts from their own

works, to give Willamette students a "sense of our literary taste," as Schell said.

Schell read from his novel-in-progress, "The Memoirs of Jake Weedsong". The novel is about a 53-year-old college instructor who gets fired for attempting to shut up an "annoying vegan" student by tossing a glass of beer at her face.

Later Schell said, "If there are any vegans here, great. That was Jake Weedsong talking—he's an irascible son of a gun."

In the excerpt Schell read, Weedsong talks about Japan, the

homeland of his wife-to-be and "the only nation in the world bereft of whiners." He also pokes fun at iambic pentameter and poet laureates, calling them "Poet Lariats" because they are often "roped

into reciting." Weedsong even dispenses with millennial anxiety: "If there are gods, they must surely be laughing at those who buy Rolexes."

Weedsong spends most of his time, however, talking about his hunting trips and the goose dinners that follow.

Knorr's poetry, most of which was read from his recently published "Standing up to the Day," also focused on hunting and other outdoor activity, with titles like "Goose Hunt, Just Before Christmas," "Berry Picking" and "Coyote or

Wolf?" Many of the poems deal with the passage of time, as they discuss recent and past hunting trips and memorable family get-togethers.

The reading revealed many of Knorr's sources of inspiration, from his father (who "still peels mandarins into one long piece of skin, but slightly slower now") to the sun (which "stands up in the day, slumps at night, hiding behind the shadow of a mountain") to his dog ("I wonder what you think? A paw on my leg tells me it's okay to not know. It would be unsafe to know."). Images of his grandfather, his parents' old house and birds singing in the hedges helped listeners to further understand Knorr's spiritual side.

One would think that, with their teaching, writing and hunting, Schell and Knorr are busy enough. But five years ago, Knorr approached Schell with the idea of starting either a press or a literary journal. The two decided to go with a journal because they could showcase more artists that way, Knorr remembered. After a couple substantial grants from the Clackamas Community College Foundation, and an appearance at a national conference, the submissions began to pour in—and they haven't slowed down since.

"It said something to us about the desire for people to just find one more place to publish," Knorr said.

According to Schell, the journal operates on a budget of about \$20,000 annually, most of which goes toward printing costs. The artwork and composition are usually done on campus at a minimal cost. For now, Schell and Knorr have to request money from several sources in order to meet their expenses, but they are in the process of creating a committee to make fundraising easier.

The CLR publishes several writers each year, including a handful of Oregonians. About 85 poems and 12 short stories go into the two issues the CLR staff puts together in the fall and spring. But there is a catch—the editors have to select these works from the nearly 1,000 short stories and 4,000 poems submitted each year. In other words, just reading submissions can be a full-time job in itself.

Also, stories and poems can be submitted, along with a \$10 fee, to be considered for the Willamette Award, a \$500 prize for each genre. A "relatively prominent judge" picks the best story and poem from a group of finalists, Knorr said. The

editors believe the award is a worthy cause, he added, because it is "one extra step" toward building a great writer's self-confidence and publishing record.

Choosing finalists, however, creates even more work for the editors. "I had a lot more hair before we had the contest," Schell said.

The CLR is especially looking for more non-fiction submissions, Knorr said. The journal usually publishes an essay or two in every issue, but only 30 or so are submitted each year. The editors would like to see more people show their interest in good creative nonfiction. However, both Schell and Knorr dislike works that attempt to borrow too much from other genres—such as essayistic short stories without scenes.

"If it's a personal essay, that's okay, but say so," Schell said. "If it's a short story, say so. But don't try to fool me."

Sometimes Schell or Knorr will read a submission that they think is really good but would be even better with a little revision in certain spots. In such a case, Knorr said, they will often send the story back to the author with suggestions. Sometimes, the author takes the advice, works on the story and submits it again. The CLR has published a couple of these revised stories, Knorr said. But the editors don't have time to counsel everyone who submits.

"You should never take umbrage at a standard rejection form," Schell said, "because it's not a personal thing." Just because editors don't respond to you personally, that

doesn't mean they don't think your submission is good, or even really good, Schell said.

The best strategy is to keep working on the story, making it as good as possible, and submitting it to every literary journal in sight,

Schell said, adding that he himself has a few boxes of rejection letters that he has kept at home over the years. "Just keep submitting," he said. "It's just a matter of time before you get published somewhere."

Above all, authors should never be worried that their

works are too mainstream (or not mainstream enough) to please editors. "There's never a common theme," Schell said. "If you flip through one of the issues you'll see we're all over the map. We just need well-crafted fiction, poetry and nonfiction."

Knorr agreed: "I just look for good work. If it knocks me out, it's in."

And in case anyone was concerned about having to cater to a couple of hunters, Schell assured the audience that in all six issues so far "there's not one guy gutting a deer."

So what advice do the editors have for someone looking to

start their own literary journal?

"Don't," both of them said, laughing.

"But seriously," Knorr added, "it's crazy... but there are a lot of rewards. Just be ready to dive in and swim like hell."

For information on submitting to the Clackamas Literary Review, visit them at <http://www.clackamas.cc.or.us/clr>. Submissions are accepted until June 1.

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CLR
CLACKAMAS LITERARY REVIEW



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Beckham Fitz-Goldberg
Wendell Mayo
Alberto Rios

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