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## Illinois Wesleyan's Literary Circle Increasingly Expressive

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## Illinois Wesleyan's Literary Circle Increasingly Expressive

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— “*You’re sketched in pencil / like all the rest of us / you’re a blank canvas / because someone was genius enough / to remind you that you were pure.*” An appreciative applause resounded against the high ceiling of the Coffee Hound, a coffee shop in downtown Bloomington often used as a creative venue by Illinois Wesleyan’s literary circle. English majors Chelsea Hillyer, a junior from Macomb, Ill., and Emily Kingery, a junior from Pecatonica, Ill., took their seats. Published poets, they had just finished reciting each other’s poems for a crowd of fellow writers, faculty members, and students interested in the creative arts.

Sponsored by the IWU chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, a national honorary society for English majors and minors, the open mic poetry reading held on a Friday night in November drew an admirable representation of Illinois Wesleyan’s writerly folk, those seeking intellectual entertainment and literary expression.

However, the reading, one of several held throughout the academic school year, is only one aspect of creative writing on IWU’s campus. Students are just as eager to have their poems and short fiction published for others to read in private as they are to perform their work for an audience.

The reading and writing of creative compositions is nothing new for Illinois Wesleyan students, who have actively taken part in literary circles since the first campus literary society appeared in 1862. Called the Belles Lettres Society, the group studied plays, held debates, and presented essays.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century produced several other literary groups, including The Munsellian, whose meetings comprised orations, readings, instrumental performances, and debates; The Adelphic, formed in 1878; and the Amateurian Society, organized in 1890. Student literary publications included *The Ventilator*, which appeared in 1872; *The Student Journal*, which appeared in 1877; and *The Oracle* and *The Avenger*, both appearing in 1888.

Today, student interest in being published is currently so high that *Tributaries*, Illinois Wesleyan University’s comprehensive journal of fine arts, went biannual this year due to an increase in submissions.

While *Tributaries* has always been popular, last year’s flood of creative output prompted the staff to increase the frequency of publication to include more writers. “We’ve had an overwhelming amount of submissions,” said Cathy Gilbert, a junior English major from Peoria who is currently serving as editor of the publication. “We had a total of just more than 100

submissions last year, and more than 150 this semester alone. That means submissions have more than doubled, and it's important for us to keep up with the work being produced."

Founded in 2001 by English writing major Jeffrey Stumpo, Class of 2003, the journal celebrates the strongest and most original work being created by Illinois' Wesleyan students. The publication is entirely student-run with assistance from a faculty advisor, and follows a blind submission process, accepting entries from students of all disciplines. Originality, quality, and purpose are main factors when considering a piece, and all selections are voted on by 12 editorial judges. Funded by Student Senate, copies of *Tributaries* are free. The journal can also be viewed at [www.iwu.edu/~tribut/](http://www.iwu.edu/~tribut/).

In addition to increasing the number of printed issues, the *Tributaries* staff is also working to broaden the publication's distribution. The goal is to make the journal available in coffeehouses throughout the Chicago area, as well as the Bloomington-Normal community and IWU campus.

However, the growth of *Tributaries* is only one sign of the heightened interest in creative writing at Illinois Wesleyan. Like their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, students eager for more literary exposure have taken it upon themselves to form their own literary groups and publications.

Hillyer recently started her own writing club with an unofficial publication called *Stuff*. "I started *Stuff* as a way for writers to be instantly rewarded for taking an initiative about their writing, and I think a great way to keep the writing community fresh is to offer writers a chance to get their work out there," said Hillyer.

Both Hillyer and Gilbert cited the benefits of publication. "The experience of submitting your work is worthwhile in itself," said Gilbert. "Being published even at a microcosmic level is good for writers' self-esteem, and we need to encourage people to express themselves in artistic ways."

"Publication, especially in a literary-friendly environment like Illinois Wesleyan, can help a writer make the transition from writing for oneself to writing for a larger audience," said Hillyer.

"Another benefit," Hillyer added, "is that literature and poetry are more accessible when you know it's your peers producing it."