

Reflecting On Jay Hopley's Visit

By Alexandra Holt

His wife calls him a “hindu presbigationalist,” a fitting title for someone filled just as fully with the natural world as with his faith. Jay Hopley, one of two guests for the last week of the Winter With the Writers, came to us at Rollins with humility and a willingness to share. Throughout his time with the student interns he shared openly his experience with crafting words, choosing poetic line, and forming his own methodology to create work that is rich with emotion and visual detail but can be read and felt by anyone who picks it up.

During the Masterclass, Hopley treated each submission with care, picking through the work and finding the greater message. He helped guide each student toward a better understanding of the piece's short-comings. His advice came with a humble authority on the subject and was greatly appreciated by both the interns and the audience.

Later in the evening, Hopley painted a vivid world of mixed emotion, a world in which the grief of death often coincides with the beauty of parakeets and the moon and the blessing of rainfall. From his work in *The Abridged History of Rainfall* we lay in the powerful wake of his words as the emotions poured from him as they had poured from the pages of the book, spilling from the podium and licking in waves the red-folded chairs of the auditorium. He told us of death and father and God and the connection they draw and twist as they coincide. He spoke of Rome and the Cathedrals and how he thinks of writing poetry as a form of prayer.

It was with the whizzing, staccato, cackling, wacky-wack, tok words of his aviary friends in his poem: “The Ranges of Birds” that the tone of the reading began to shift. He divulged that in his past he had a collection of hound dogs who howled in the night in happy unison and stood six strong as he walked them every morning, only one always lagged behind, up on two paws seeking hugs as they walked. His humor and embrace of the multiplicity of life became more and more clear as he spoke about animals and nature and what they mean to him, and how his editor told him he needed to cut down a bit on moon imagery—I guess it was a bit too much. And as he said in the Q&A, he had used up all that was allowed of darkened skies and rain and there would be absolutely no birds in his next book of poems.

As the final guest of Winter With the Writers, his impression on the interns and the audience was a steady patience with life and all the hurtles it brings, but also all the joys. We are grateful for this perspective in the closing of the festival and as we go back to our own separate dramas we will remember to notice the sky, whatever its color, and the moon, and the birds, and the howling of dogs in the night.