

Intern Journal: A Week with Luis Muñoz

By Chloe Sybert

This week at the Festival, we had the privilege of welcoming Spanish poet Luis Muñoz. One of my favorite moments of Muñoz's visit was when, during his Craft Talk on Thursday, he detailed the selection of his new collection's title, *Limpiar Pescado* (Cleaning Fish). The poet said that when he was young, he used to watch his mother clean fish to prepare it for cooking, and it reminded him of the way that a poet works hands-on with words. Later that night, at the Q&A session following the reading, Muñoz answered a question about writing in Spanish by saying that the appeal for him is the "joy of working with the [Spanish] language." Across the visit, Muñoz identified with being a wordsmith of this beautiful language, and we could tell that the captivated audiences agreed.

Muñoz's mastery of Spanish poetics came through time and again as he read and discussed his poetry from his 2015 collection, *From Behind What Landscape: New and Selected Poems*. In Muñoz's Craft Talk, my fellow interns and I had the pleasure of asking him questions about the poetry we had read in this stunning bilingual edition. When one of our interns asked Muñoz a question about his poem "Fábula del tiempo (Fable About Time)", he not only answered the question but suggested that the two read the poem, with Muñoz first reading the Spanish version, and the intern reading the English translation. The rest of the Craft Talk went on in this way, a certain rhythm developing, with Muñoz and members of the intern audience reading in tandem and then discussing the poems. Finally, Muñoz closed the session with a response to my question about the inspiration for "Nocturnidad (Evening Hours)", which deals with remembering the names of former lovers in relation to one's hope for future love. If you had love once, Muñoz said of the inspiration, then "you can have it again."

The Craft Talk was not the only way that students had the pleasure of learning from Muñoz; as one of the Irving Bacheller Chairs of Creative Writing, he taught a poetry class centered around Spanish writer Garcia Lorca, one of many Spanish writers whom he cited as major influences. In the Lorca class, students were given various poetry exercises. In one exercise, students were given a poem of Lorca's about New York, which described the city with strong words and imagery. Then, the students were to write about a city they loved using the same strong devices of description as are used in the poem. This exercise struck me as both a creative technique and a way to be, as Muñoz and Garth Greenwell discussed in their Q&A session, "in communication" with another writer.

Muñoz's joint reading with partner and translator Greenwell continued to demonstrate the simple yet profound romance in his poetry. From podiums on either side of the stage, Muñoz read poems in their original Spanish, and Greenwell would then read his English translation, between passages of Greenwell's novel *What Belongs to You*. The haunting novel deals with desire and the sadness that

comes with it, and reading these passages alongside Muñoz's work highlighted the emotional significance of the poems. For example, the pair read "Ocho de la mañana (Eight in the Morning)", which speaks of a sleeping lover and ends "I don't know if I am part of his dream. / Wanting is a ladder / and I don't know if it reaches his dream."

It was a true privilege to have an important poet like Muñoz here at Rollins and not only let us hear the confidence and passion with which he reads, but also teach us about the process by which he writes these wonderfully perceptive poems.