

An Odyssey of Writing with Barbara Hamby

By Lea Warren

This past week, Rollins had the honor of hosting poet and fiction writer Barbara Hamby, the acclaimed author of the short story collection, *Lester Higata's 20th Century*, as well as the poetry books *Bird Odyssey*, *Seriously Funny*, and more. Hamby, a creative writing professor at FSU in North Florida, came to campus this week not only to offer her expertise to the Winter With the Writers interns, but also a group of students in a one credit course about writing humor in poetry.

Throughout the week, she has given advice to students, interns, and audience members alike about the elusive craft of poetry. She answered questions about her journey as a writer, her process, her published works, and her stance on the different topics (from hurricane Katrina to giving voice to the women of Homer's *Odyssey*) covered in her writing.

During the Master Class on Thursday, February 21st at 4:00pm, she offered constructive feedback to our interns concerning their submitted poetry. Her detailed instruction featured an emphasis on giving attention to the senses, and the importance of concrete images in poetry. Our interns for the week were told to push their images further, and encouraged to hone in on the details of the poetry that sticks in the mind, whether invoking sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell. At one point, in answer to a question stemmed from student work with a difficult identity topic, Hamby offered insight into her own fiction writing. Referencing her decision to follow a Japanese man and WWII vet in Hawaii in her short story collection, she revealed her draw to the topic—stemming from her upbringing in Hawaii and the people that surrounded her—and how she navigated the difficult task of inviting in a character that is nothing like oneself.

At the reading on Thursday evening, hosted in Bush Auditorium, Hamby graced an avid audience with a new poem in which she explored the ability and limitation of words when relating to a specific topic—in this case, parties. The language spilled from her in a harmonious manner that enraptured those in attendance. From this new piece, she moved on to *Bird Odyssey*, her most recent collection of poems. She read several of her unique and witty poems, including “Fried Chicken Boiled Peanut Blues,” “Elvis and Tolstoy Save the World,” and “The Odyssey in Six Sonnets,” a collection of short poems detailing *The Odyssey* from the female characters' perspectives.

Once she had completed her impactful reading, Hamby and Professor Carol Frost sat down for an interview session featuring questions from the audience, that ranged from the ordering of her short stories and poems in her books to who her favorite sibling was (submitted as a question by her lovely sister, who joined us this week in support).

By the end of the night, I think it is fair to say that everyone left feeling a bit more passionate about poetry, and writing in general. Hamby offered insight into the beautiful, comical (and simultaneously serious), revitalizing thing that is poetry.

We thank her for her visit, and hope to read more from her soon.