

Winter with the Writers 2019: Redefining “Writing”

By Melissa Simon

Writing – like many aspects of life – has evolved over the years, shifting and stretching itself into a completely new medium. This year’s Winter with the Writers Festival brought a variation of writers ranging from comedians, screenwriters, producers, poets, memoirists, and novelists to Rollins College, expanding upon notion of what a writer is and *can* do. Writing is not necessarily caged within the box of “literary art,” for its possibilities have expanded to the reaches of Netflix specials and improv classes.

Mike Birbiglia along with his wife, Jen Hope Stein, offered spectacular advice via their Skype session during the festival’s first week that showed the diversity of the medium, and how their processes reflected the precision of craft that any novelist or poet would need. Liz Allen also broke this mold through her implication of improv as a writing methodology. In her workshop, she discussed the writer’s inability to often say ‘yes’ to their ideas, exposing the necessity of allowing thoughts to get out of the mind – regardless of their merit. Openness became a theme in which she instructed both improv performers and writers alike to embrace.

Another aspect that we were instructed to embrace was our past – as seen through Brian Turner’s poetry and memoir. Our memories are a tank in which we can dive into and pull ideas from, reworking them into an artform that surrenders the heavier moments of our lives to the sentimental world of the written word. Barbara Hamby explored this idea as well, interjecting her own brand of humor into the form of poetry. Her advice offered the aspiring poet to take these moments and find the *seriously funny* elements hidden within them and use specific, non-conventional imagery to express these underlying emotions.

National Book Award Finalists, Jennifer Clement and Daniel Gumbiner, offered similar advice when it came to breaking conventions. Clement focused on the craft of writing with an emphasis upon the elements anyone could use to improve their writing. Her ideas of research, syntax, and diction proved to be useful advice for the ambitious writer. Gumbiner talked craft as well, offering a fascinating look into the ideas of plots and themes that makes a story move organically in the reader’s mind, as well as look into what makes specific characters tick and sound natural. Both writers hold a command of their language and craft that demonstrates why their work is held with such great esteem nationwide.

With such amazing talent, February 2019’s Winter with the Writers Festival has once again proved to be a success. The community as well as the campus welcomed these unique individuals and have learned so much from them. Writing no longer belongs to just the poets and novelists. Writing has expanded its definition to include so many non-traditional avenues for expressing thought. There is so much more that the future of the festival, the college, and the community have yet to see – hopefully for many years to come!