

Reflecting on Madison Smartt Bell's Visit

By Adrienne Barton

Madison Smartt Bell's departure heralds the end of the final week in the 2014 Winter With the Writers season. While he was the last visiting author, Bell certainly didn't disappoint and led a master class and reading that taught all who attended valuable lessons on fiction, his eclectic taste in music, as well as insight into his writing origins and personal philosophy on writing.

During Thursday's master class, Bell posed one question about every story being workshopped: what is the story's intended total effect? Devoting 13.3 repeating minutes to each submitted piece, he facilitated a discussion that allowed everyone to suss out what each story was trying to be, and what this means for the characters, writer, and the reader.

Members of the Winter Park and Rollins College communities gathered that evening to hear him read from his upcoming novel, *Behind the Moon*. The idea for the novel began as a dream, and like all dreams, most of it had left his head by the time he'd awoken. However, what he was left with was enough to craft a book around a particular form and patterning.

His humour and overall good-naturedness were on display as the Q&A session after the reading ended. "Why are you a writer?" asked a member of the audience.

"I was three years old when I naively decided that I wanted to learn to read." His response created a veritable timeline of his career, from his young fascination to C.S. Lewis and his internalization of Mark Twain, to his current status as a writer, someone with an acute attention to detail and technique. "Do something so different that you can't even describe what it is." His disinterest with creating any sort of brand - focusing on the work itself rather than any sort of methodology - connect with his urge to write in order to say something, writing because you want to write. Among the wealth of advice he imparted during his visit, I think this will linger with me the most. Write to write, and be a little weird, it'll probably work out.