

Our Meeting with American Author Eric PUCHNER



On May 19th, Eric PUCHNER, the American author of the novel “Model Home” and the more recently published collection of short stories “Last day on Earth,” visited us in Jacam. Before beginning our interview, some of our classmates re-acted the opening scene of “Mission”, a short story from “Music through the Floor” that we had been studying in English class with Mrs Baës for a few weeks.

After this “amazing” (the author’s own words!) sketch which made PUCHNER feel like he was “inside his book”, we started to ask him about his short story. As we imagined it, Nils, one of the two main characters in “Mission” was broadly inspired by himself. As a matter of fact, years ago, the American writer used to live in the Mission District in San Francisco where he was teaching English to a “wild and funny class” of immigrants. Moreover, just as Nils had problems with one of his students, an elderly Mexican woman called Lorena Poot who loathed him for no obvious reason, Eric PUCHNER was hated in the same way by a student.

Then, we questioned him about the different aspects of his job which he admitted was sometimes “a torture” for him because of the hard work and the constant revision. However, In spite of this, he hopes to write all his life. And as a piece of advice for a budding writer, “be prepared to be poor, be dogged and believe in yourself” said PUCHNER, half laughing, half serious.

The final part of our interview was about American society and one important issue raised in his short story, which applies more than ever today in the United-States : racism. Our guest explained to us that America was a “big, polarized and complicated country” and if the middle of the country was more conservative, it wasn’t the case for all the other states. But even if he loves America, the novelist lived one of the worst days of his life on the 9th of November 2016. Despite Trump’s election, he is confident about the future of the US, thanks to the people resisting every day in the streets, with anger and rage.

This interesting and thought-provoking conversation with the funny and eloquent Eric PUCHNER changed not only the class’ vision about the short story “Mission”, it also made us reflect on the world that surrounds us, more particularly on the issue of racism and the difficulties of integration that immigrants face every day. These desperate people who hope for a better life when they leave everything behind them.

Unfortunately, they were not here, with us, to hear Mr.PUCHNER told a sad truth : “The American Dream never existed, it is only a fantasy, a myth.”

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